OLD!

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

retro* GAMER™

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THE BEST GAMES TO PLAY ON THE FAMICOM DISK SYSTEM



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MYTH: HISTORY IN THE MAKING
ODDWORLD SERIES | RAGE RACER
COLIN PORCH | THE YOUNG ONES



EVOLUTION OF BEAT-'EM-UPS

KEY JAPANESE DEVELOPERS DISCUSS THE HISTORY BEHIND THE POPULAR GENRE

ACCESS SOFTWARE

THE DEVELOPER THAT RAIDED MOSCOW AND SCORED A HOLE-IN-ONE



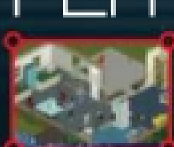
HOW BEAM SOFTWARE HACKED THE SNES TO CREATE A CYBERPUNK CLASSIC

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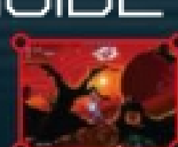


FROM MINER WILLY TO MARIO: YOUR VIDEOGAME HEROES CELEBRATED

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THE SIMS
HOW WILL WRIGHT CREATED THE PC'S BIGGEST FRANCHISE

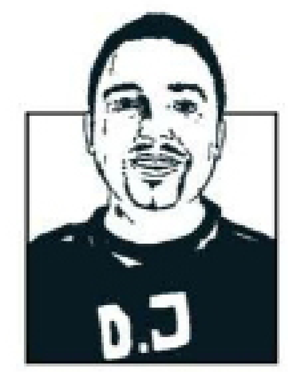


EARTHWORM JIM
DOUG TENNAPEL AND DAVE PERRY DISCUSS SHINY ENTERTAINMENT'S 16-BIT CELEBRITY

ip IMAGINE PUBLISHING
Digital Edition
GreatDigitalMags.com
ISSUE 120



THE RETROBATES FAVOURITE VIDEOGAME ICON



DARRAN JONES
It's clearly Strider. He exudes a coolness that other videogame heroes can only dream of having. Have I ever said how much I like him?
Expertise:
Juggling a beautiful wife, two gorgeous girls and an award-winning magazine
Currently playing:
Castlevania: Lords Of Shadow Ultimate Edition
Favourite game of all time:
Strider



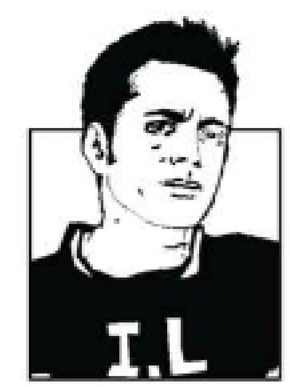
PAUL DRURY
Ulala from *Space Channel 5*. Where she leads, I will follow…
Expertise:
Anti-scrolling
Currently playing:
Hotline Miami
Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space



PAUL DAVIES
I'll have to say Master Chief because of all that hidden hurt… and of course all the *Halo* games kick ass!
Expertise:
Banging my head against a brick wall
Currently playing:
Halo 4
Favourite game of all time:
Ghouls 'N Ghosts



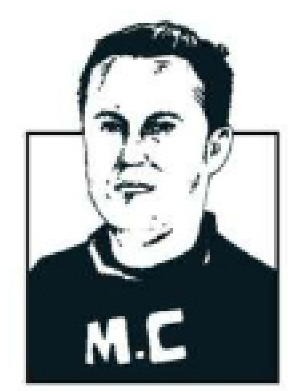
JASON KELK
I like cute characters so Bub and Bob both spring to mind – please don't make me choose just one!
Expertise:
Being a homebrew hero
Currently playing:
Warhawk (Atari 8-bit)
Favourite game of all time:
IO



IAIN LEE
John Stryker from *Strykers Run* – tough, relentless and a little bit slow. My kind of guy.
Expertise:
Pretending to be an American on Xbox Live
Currently Playing:
Halo 4
Favourite game of all time:
Elite (the BBC B version)



DAVID CROOKES
Chloe from *Uncharted* because I'm sad like that. She was cool though.
Expertise:
All things Amstrad CPC, *Dizzy*, Atari Lynx
Currently playing:
Grand Theft Auto III
Favourite game of all time:
Broken Sword



MARTYN CARROLL
Got to be Mario. Of the 50 best games ever made, he's in about half of them!
Expertise:
8-bit stuff
Currently playing:
Brothers: A Tale Of Two Sons
Favourite game of all time:
Jet Set Willy

LOADING…



I've played a lot of remakes lately, partly for my job and partly for my own personal enjoyment (who am I kidding? They're the same thing). Reading numerous reviews of games like *Shadowrun Returns*, *DuckTales Remastered*, *Dungeons & Dragons: Chronicles Of Mystara* and *Flashback HD* and seeing comments on the incoming *Strider* made me realise that developers are continually caught between a rock and a hard place when tackling these games. And let's not even mention the poor developers who get saddled with each new *Sonic* game.

It appears that everyone wants something different from these updates/remakes. Some want completely overhauled mechanics; others want brand new visuals, while some want the original games to be included, or have the game stick slavishly to the original version. How on earth do you keep such a diverse selection happy? While I don't create updates of games, I do deal with an eclectic audience, so I know the difficulties faced in trying to please everybody.

Having said that, I'm as vocal as anyone and I've already got a list of demands for the new *Strider* game that are as long as my arm that I'm sure won't appear. But as a gamer, I'm at least grateful that publishers are revisting these classics, even if I occasionally end up disappointed.

Enjoy the magazine,



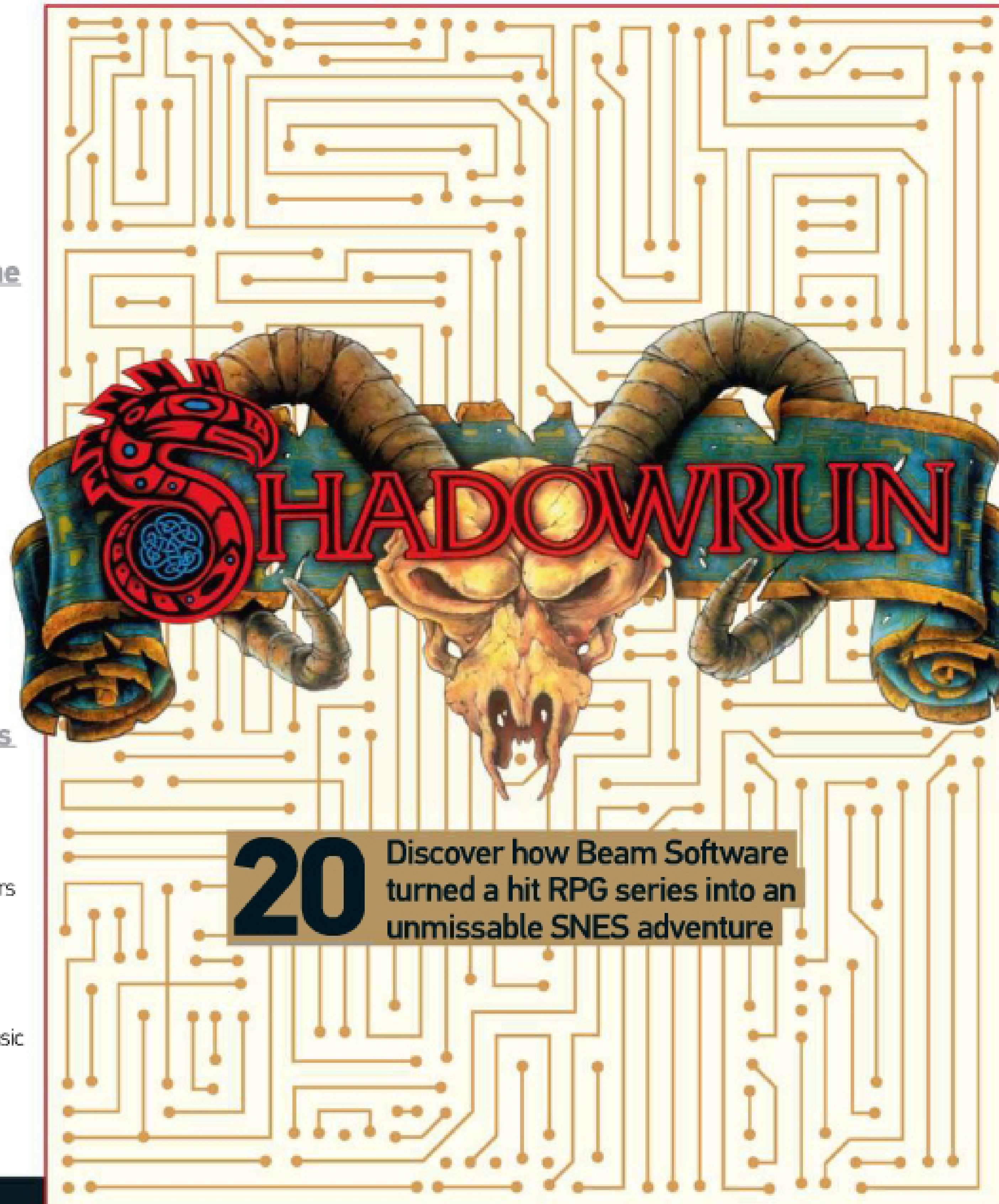
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>> Load 120 Breathing new life into classic games

FEATURED

RETRO REVIVALS

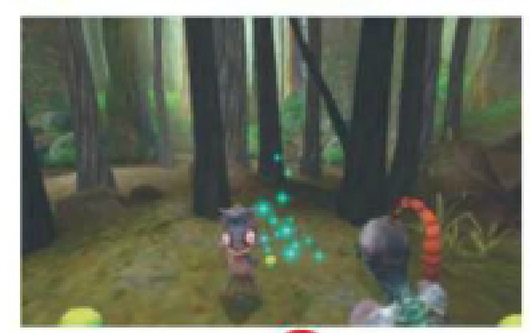


> "A high point in sandbox-based game design"
> Samuel Roberts





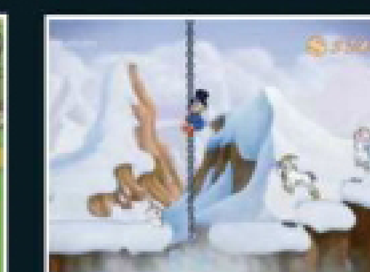


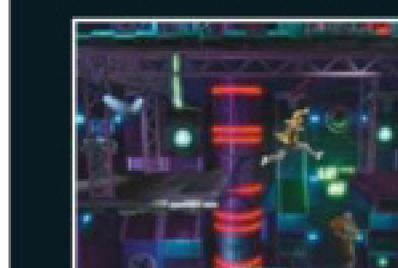


ESSENTIALS

RETRO RATED







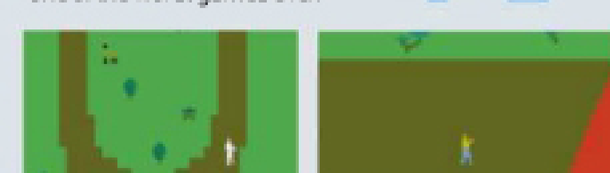
In the hot seat this month...





retro GAMER.net READER'S REVIVAL





retroradar

>> GIVE US TWO MINUTES AND WE'LL GIVE YOU THE RETRO WORLD



>> We kick off this month's news with a world exclusive interview on Capcom's new Strider game. We also speak to Ste Pickford about the return of Plok and look at the numerous HD updates and sequels heading your way. Enjoy…

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» [Xbox 360] Developer Double Helix Games doesn't have an amazing track record, but we're hoping *Strider* and *Killer Instinct* turn that around.



RESURRECTING STRIDER

JAMES VANCE TALKS EXCLUSIVELY ABOUT STRIDER'S RETURN

S*trider* was a revelation when it was released in 1989, delivering spectacular boss fights, imaginative level design and the greatest second level in the history of videogames.

Despite this brilliance, *Strider* only received one official sequel, and while he's appeared in countless cameo roles throughout the years, he's never been able to secure a further sequel – until now. James Vance, *Strider's* producer, explains why the time is right for the iconic ninja to make his comeback.

So is *Strider* a reboot or a brand new game?

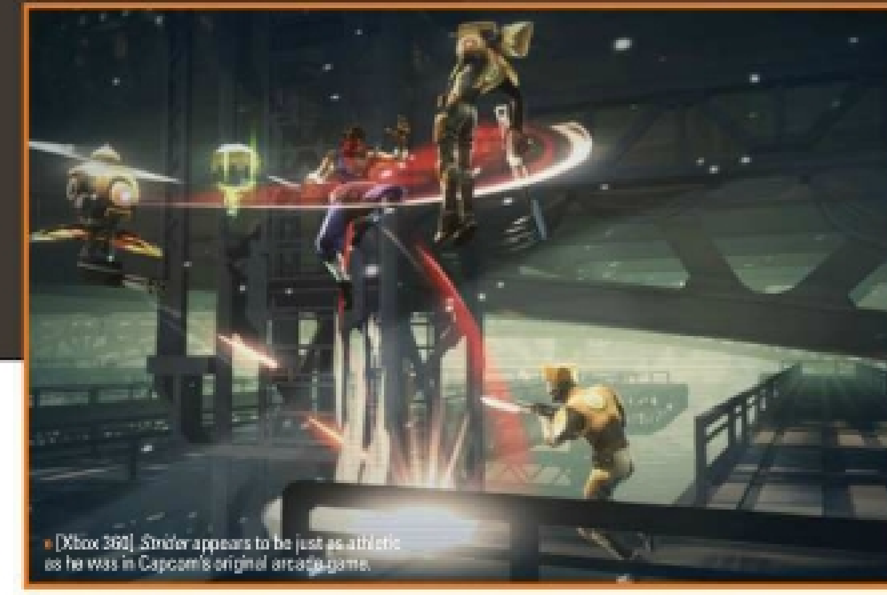
Strider is a brand new game. It takes place within the *Strider* universe and is a re-imagining of the hero *Strider* Hiryu's confrontation with the evil world dictator Grand Master Meio.

How did you get the job of creating *Strider*?

The original *Strider* on the Sega Mega Drive left a huge impression on me as a child and has remained one of my all-time favourite games. During my initial job interview at Capcom I was asked which Capcom franchises I would like to work on. I responded with *Okami*, *Resident Evil* and *Strider*. To my surprise, not long after I was hired I was assigned to this *Strider* project, which at that time was at the initial stage of pre-production. I then worked with Andrew Szymanski, the senior producer, key Osaka staff and Double Helix Games to create a game concept that, as *Strider* fans, we felt passionate about and that also guaranteed core gameplay, graphic and design elements that would appeal to both long-time fans and series newcomers.

Can we expect to see any enemies from the original game return?

Yes. This new *Strider* takes place in the same *Strider* universe as the previous titles, and we are very proactive in paying respect to enemies and other elements from previous games wherever they benefit the design and can provide a unique and engaging experience. At San Diego Comic-Con 2013 we revealed the Kazakh troopers, flying robots as well as a re-imagining of the Ouroboros character from previous *Strider* games. These are just a few of the familiar characters who, along with a new cast of unique characters, will make an appearance in the game.



» [Xbox 360] *Strider* appears to be just as athletic as he was in Capcom's original arcade game.

How are you handling the pressure from *Strider*'s many fans?

I've been a *Strider* fan since I was a child, so the main pressure to deliver a compelling and entertaining *Strider* experience comes from me. More than anything I am excited to be working on a time-honoured game with such a passionate fan following.

What new enhancements are you adding to the reboot?

The philosophy from the beginning was not to take away, but to always add to the core *Strider* experience. Hiryu begins the game as strong and as agile as in *Strider* and *Strider II*, and his abilities continue to expand across the course of the entire game. We have already revealed two plasma cypher augmentations, and have a vast array of new items and abilities for the player to discover and enjoy.

Item and ability acquisition also play into the vastly expanded size and scope of the game world. Whereas previous titles were relatively linear affairs, *Strider* features a massive, completely interconnected game world. It is through the exploration of this game world that players will discover and unlock their newfound abilities.

Finally, current and next generation hardware allows us to realise a beautiful and detailed game world using high-end graphic technologies and modern rendering techniques.

How long have you been working on the reboot of *Strider* and what's been the hardest thing you've encountered from a gameplay point of view?

I've been working on *Strider* for roughly 18 months. The most challenging gameplay element has been designing the interconnected game map for Hiryu's extremely quick and agile character. Creating logical pathways, obstacles and challenges for the player, when they can basically go anywhere and climb on anything has been a challenge. However, because we felt so strongly about delivering a large interconnected game world, we embraced this challenge from the offset and are confident players will enjoy the final product.

We know Isuke isn't involved, but are there any people from *Strider II* helping out?

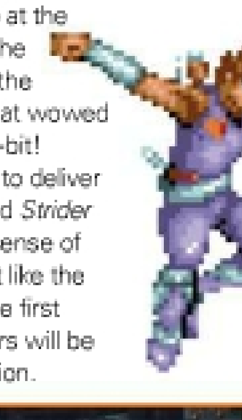
Yes. Osaka based staff who worked on *Strider II* have been instrumental in shaping and contributing to the visual look and game design to ensure this new *Strider* remains true to the *Strider* universe, and at the same time delivers a genuine Capcom experience. The Capcom Osaka team art director who designed the majority of the characters in this new *Strider* – including Hiryu – was also the lead character designer for *Strider II*.

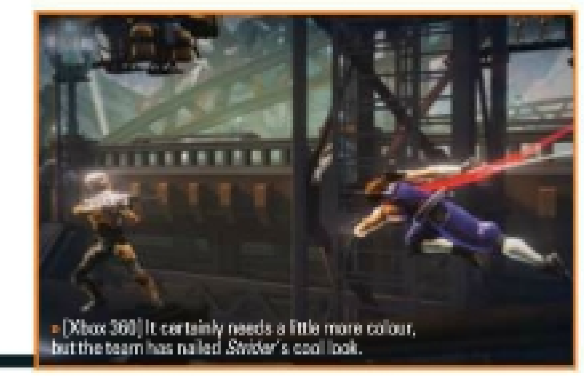
Why do you think the original *Strider* remains so popular among the gaming community?

There are a variety of reasons. For me, at the time it was the unprecedented freedom of movement and high-speed action that the game offered. There really were no other titles which allowed the player to move both horizontally and vertically, run up and down sloped surfaces and climb on any surface, all the while engaging the enemy in combat. The graphics, which featured detailed and extremely unique designs, were also amazing.

The original *Strider* came at the transition from the 8-bit to the 16-bit generation, and was the first home console game that wowed the world with power of 16-bit!

We've worked very hard to deliver and expand upon *Strider* and *Strider II*'s high-speed action and sense of freedom, and hope that just like the original we will be one of the first games next generation users will be proud to add to their collection.





» [Xbox 360] It certainly needs a little more colour, but the team has nailed *Strider*'s cool look.

What We Want From Capcom's reboot

>> How Double Helix Games can make its new Strider game even better

Mecha Pon

Strider has some of the most imaginative bosses around, and Mecha Pon is easily one of our favourites. He's essentially a gigantic gorilla who is not afraid to pound Strider into the ground if he gets too close to him. Double Helix Games is being a little cagey about whether he's going to appear, but we can't really imagine a *Strider* game without him.



Spectacle

Strider has the greatest second level of any videogame ever made. This is fact. As a result, we're expecting Double Helix Games to somehow top this momentous piece of level design when *Strider* gets released next year. It seems unlikely, based on the continuous world it's trying to create, but that won't stop us sadly wishing for it like the fanboys we are.



Unlockables

Everyone likes free stuff, so why not include both *Strider* and *Strider II* as unlockables upon completing the game. We can't imagine they would be that hard to include and it would save us a fortune, as we could ignore the ridiculously expensive PlayStation PAL version that keeps climbing in price. Come on guys, you know it makes sense.



A sequel

Yes we're jumping the gun, but we want a sequel. In fact we don't want a sequel, but a simple remake of the original game. WayForward probably isn't busy now *DuckTales Remastered* is finished, so give the developer a big sack of cash and let its amazing artists run rampant. We can only imagine how amazing an HD, 2D remake would look.



THE RETRO DEBATE

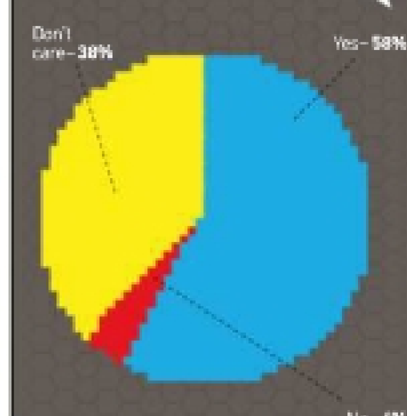
>> From the forum: Readers weigh in on Strider

VISIT RETROGAMER.NET/FORUM TO HAVE YOUR SAY

"Never been a fan of the original Striders. Too glitchy to look good. Really looking forward to Castle of Illusion remake the most" samhain81

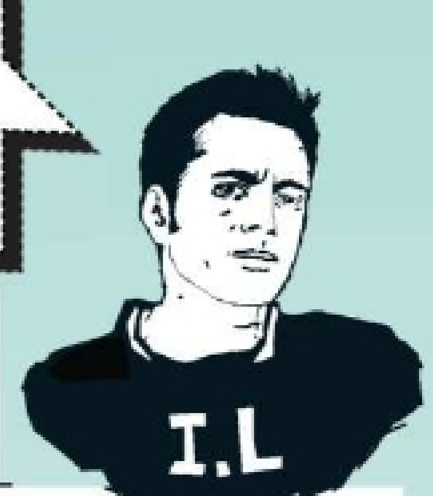
"I'm very much looking forward to this! I'm feeling confident already that this will be better than the absolutely tripe Strider II (Mega Drive) Never has a sequel let me down has much as that did" ArchaicKoala

"Years ago I played MAME – every single game – and concluded Strider was the best arcade game ever, and this was before I'd picked up Retro Gamer. So yes, I am excited, Strider is just something else in my opinion. Having said that… I hope they don't muck it up!" nef1



Here's the bio...
Iain Lee has been a fervent gamer since he was tiny. And that was a long time ago. In between playing computer games and collecting crap from eBay, he has presented Channel 4's *The 11 O'Clock Show* and *Rise*, and currently does bits of stand-up as well as presenting the *2 Hour Long Late Night Radio Show* on Absolute Radio at 11pm.

Hi there, my name's **Iain Lee**. You might remember me from Thumb Bandits, The 11 O'Clock Show and Absolute Radio, but now I'm here to confess my love for retro



Ouch! That Hurt

What's the worst moment in your gaming history? For me it was probably when I made the decision to buy my first PlayStation. I had been so blown away by my friend's Sega Saturn that I knew I had to get back into games in a big way. I trawled all over London (I didn't have the internet then! How mental is that?) going into various stores asking whether I should get a Saturn or a PlayStation. I did not want to f*** up like my dad did in the Eighties when we ended up getting a Betamax video. And to be honest, that was what was putting me off getting a PlayStation – the fact that Sony had let me down so badly in the past resulting in actual physical injury as I constantly got my face pummelled by the rough and common VHS owners.

I eventually settled on the PlayStation. It was tough, but most of the evidence was indicating that the Saturn was possibly already on the turn and there was a massive supply of games for Sony's wonder machine.

The thing is, at the time I had just left college, had no work, was signing on and was skint. Absolutely broke. I think the PlayStation was around £400. A *lot* of money, but I just had to have one. I knew that, somehow, this machine was important to me and that my life would be tied to it and gaming in one way or another. All right, I didn't get that spiritual feeling, I just wanted to play *WipEout*.

Once I'd made the choice, I then had to find the best deal. I think I ended up getting it from Dixons, which was offering some free games with it. I did something I had never done before and bought it on the never never. There was no way I could pay for it outright and I couldn't ask my mum for the money! She would be furious. I finally went in, determined to make this life changing purchase...

Got it, took it home and played the shit out of it. As well as *WipEout* I also got some game where you were a jumping rabbit and had to, you know, jump and stuff. I think you jumped onto clouds. I don't remember. I remember even less of the third game I got which was pony. But I didn't care. I had my console and I was happy.

That changed 7 days later.

Literally a week to the day I walked past the same shop I had made this extravagant purchase from. I could not believe my eyes. The expensive bundle that had cost me £400 was reduced to an earth-shatteringly low £259. Shit. That hurt. I felt betrayed and stupid. Why had I jumped into this so recklessly? I hadn't. I'd spent three months weighing it all up, but still...

We've all been there, spent more money than we should've, felt betrayed by a decision a company made... but I guess that's part of the romance of videogames.



»Playstation photography courtesy of Evan-Amos



Jon and Ste Pickford pose for a publicity shot of the rather excellent *Magnetic Billiards: Blueprint*



[SNES] Plok started out as the hero of his own Super Nintendo game back in 1993.

PLOK RETURNS

STE PICKFORD ON PLOK'S COMIC COMEBACK

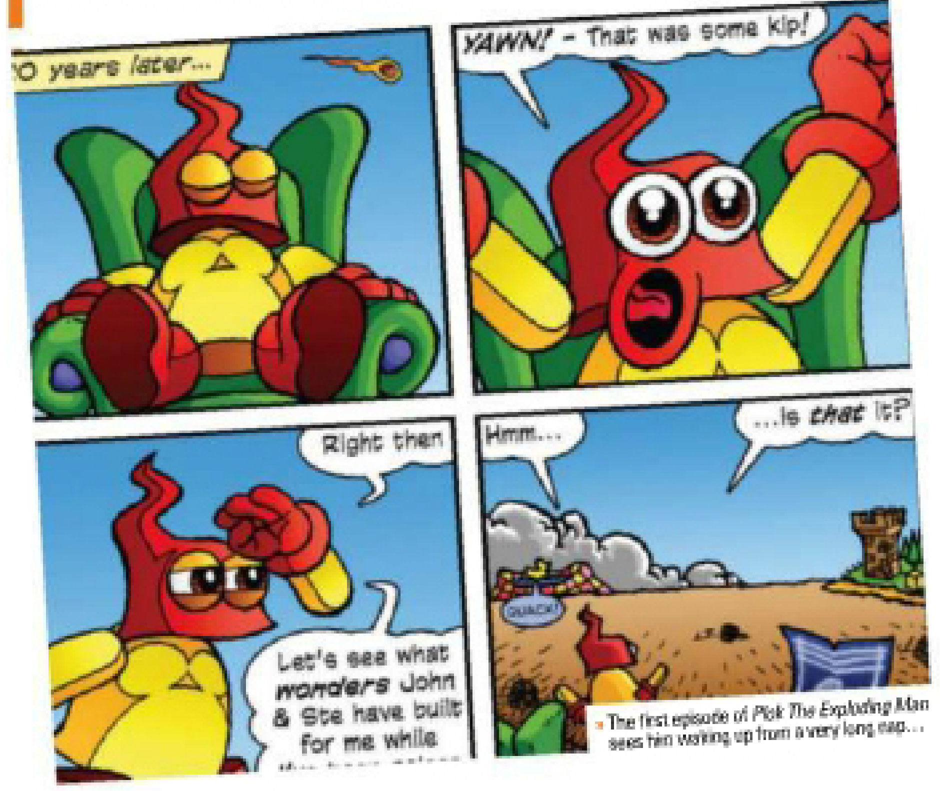
It's been a while since the Pickford brothers' limb-flinging platform hero buzz-sawed into action on the Super Nintendo and, despite a cameo 'boss' appearance in Super Fighter Team's Lynx shooter *Zaku* a few years ago, we've missed the cute little hoodie's flag-hunting antics. However, we can happily inform you that Plok is back in his own regular online comic-strip, *Plok The Exploding Man*, written and created by the Pickfords themselves. We asked Ste Pickford to spill the beans on Plok's new career as a comic character, and why the brothers decided the time was right for his return.

"Partly, it was a response to the constant requests we get for a re-release of *Plok* on Virtual Console/3DS, or for a sequel," Ste explains. "But, mainly, I think we just wanted to do something with Plok. He's got a lot of fans, and he's a character we are proud of creating. We felt that we should be making more use of him, and a comic strip seemed like the quickest way of bringing him back."

"We thought doing a comic in our spare time would also be a nice way to put something out there more regularly so we'd get the satisfaction of 'completing' something on a more regular basis than once every couple of years, and also get some regular feedback. Our plan is to publish a new strip each time we finish drawing a new one, so I'm hoping that's about once a week."

Ste seems pleased with the reaction to the project (three comic strips have been posted as we go to press.) "It's been great fun getting in touch with *Plok* fans out there, and hearing all their stories about how *Plok* affected their childhood and how they'd curse at how hard it was," he chuckles. "I was worried people would say 'is that it?' when they saw a little four-panel comic strip, but it's all been really positive so far." So with all this new-found attention for the explosively-volatile little fella, what about a new *Plok* game then Ste? "No comment!" he laughs. Still, according to the Pickfords' website "anything is possible…" But for now, catch up with Plok's new comic-style adventures at www.zee-3.com/plok.





The first episode of *Plok The Exploding Man* sees him waking up from a very long nap…

RETRO GAMER COASTERS OUT NOW

Fans of Retro Gamer will love our excellent coasters. Available in packs of four, they feature some of our best covers from the past 100 issues and are the perfect accompaniment to our excellent **Retro Gamer** mugs. Featuring high quality prints and a strong cork backing, they're coated with a lovely gloss finish, making them extremely durable. A pack of four costs just £4.99, so order a set from **www.imagineshop.co.uk**



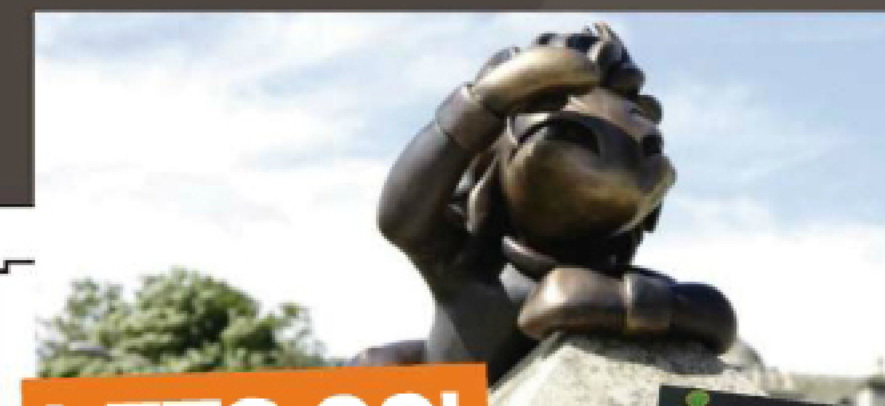
THE SOUL STILL BURNS

SOULCALIBUR II GETS HD UPDATE

Namco Bandai has announced that a new HD update of *SoulCalibur II*, with full online multiplayer support, is on its way for Xbox 360 and PS3. The re-release is set for some time this autumn to tie in with the tenth anniversary of the classic weapon-based brawler. Namco is promising "vibrant updated graphics" and an "online infrastructure featuring brand new netcode overseen by the Project Soul team", which leads us to believe that it will be much better than the simplified port of *SoulCalibur* previously released on Xbox Live. As we have fond memories of wacking Darran around the head with a lethal-looking flail thingy as the saucy Ivy Valentine on the PS2 version, we're looking forward to doing it all over again in pin-sharp resolution.



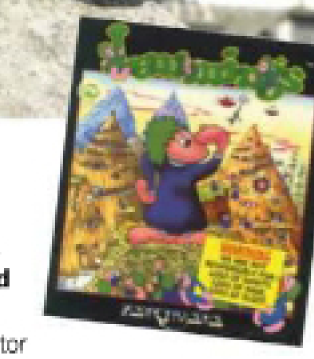
[Xbox] *Soul Calibur II* looked fantastic on last-gen consoles, so now it should look amazing.



© Tracey Dixon 2013

LETS GO!

LEMMINGS IMMORTALIZED IN BRONZE



A new sculpture commemorating DMA Design's *Lemmings* has been unveiled in Dundee, close to the company's former headquarters. Created by sculptor and *Lemmings* fan Alyson Conway, the artwork was commissioned by the city's council in partnership with Scottish Enterprise. It joins existing tributes to Dundee's culture – sculptures of Desperate Dan and Minnie the Minx of *The Dandy* and *Beano* comic fame. "I completed *Lemmings* and its follow-up back in the day, so I feel I know them pretty well," stated Alyson in Dundee's *The Courier*. "The game was created at the bottom of Perth Road, so my idea was that the Lemmings come wandering up the road to the new steps at Seabraes."

Lemmings was a massive hit for the Scottish developer back in 1991, selling over 15 million copies on multiple platforms, including an impressive 55,000 units on its release day alone. From what we hear the work has already caused quite a stir among the local populace – and also around the world – among fans of the survival-averse mop-topped characters. The sculpture is a wonderful symbol and a nod to Dundee's rich history of game design, and we're hoping this could be the start of a movement to celebrate more British gaming icons in similar style. What about a statue of Sabreman in Twycross town centre? Or a six-foot Miner Willy on Liverpool's historic waterfront? The possibilities are endless!



©Steve Hammond 2013

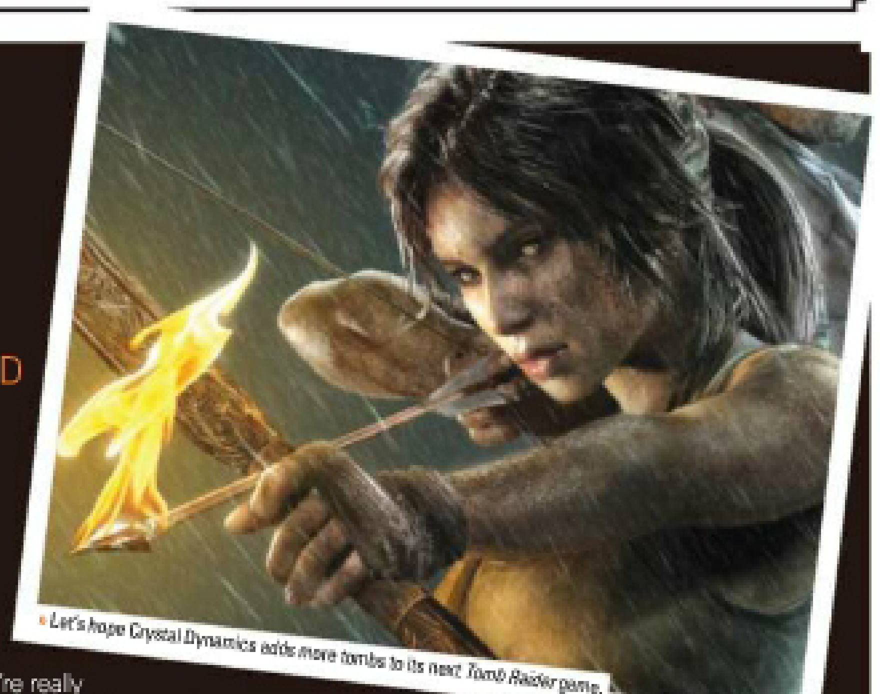
Alyson Conway poses with her Lemmings sculpture at Seabraes, Dundee.

LARA'S BACK

NEW TOMB RAIDER CONFIRMED

Square Enix have confirmed that a next-gen *Tomb Raider* game is in the works, following the recent reboot of the franchise that has now sold in excess of 3 million copies. The company's European and North American CEO, Phil Rogers, hinted that the new title might be linked to an upcoming Dark Horse comic book series, which would bridge the gap between the two game instalments, while comic series writer Gail Simone confirmed this would be the case in an interview with Kotaku.

We're really please with this recent announcement, as *Tomb Raider*, while far from perfect, was a cracking adventure that helped make Lara more relevant to today's gamers. Here's hoping that the sequel focuses more on the survival aspects that were a little undercooked. We'd like to see a bigger focus on actual tomb raiding as well. Just keep Rhianna Pratchett involved.



Let's hope Crystal Dynamics adds more tombs to its next *Tomb Raider* game.

retro columns

>> PAUL DAVIES GIVES HIS VIEWS ON THE RETRO WORLD

Here's my bio…
In 1992 I started out on *Mean Machines Sega* and *Nintendo Magazine System*. In 1995 I became editor of *C&VG*. I led the *C&VG* website from 1998 until Christmas 2000, then I left journalism to be concept design manager at Criterion Games. I returned to journalism in 2002 and from 2005 I've been running my own company, Unlikely Hero.



Hello, retro gamers. My name is **Paul Davies**. I used to be the editor of C&VG and have also worked on a number of classic gaming magazines over the years

Retro Reading Rocks

Magazines are better gaming companions than websites, I'm now sure of it. The spirit of *Zzap!64*, *Mean Machines* and old-school *C&VG* burned brightest of all because they were on the printed page.

Before I stride ahead and discover that this sweet-smelling meadow before me is in fact a sea of forum snipers, I should point out that this isn't about quality over quantity. Nor is it about how hard it was to share your written opinion/expertise with fellow gamers "when I were a lad". None of that *Monty Python* 'Four Yorkshiremen' one-upmanship, I promise. There is, however, an element of pining for the old days – but I think that's okay inside of **Retro Gamer**.

The potential for games mags to incite passion for a new and developing scene was (and still is) because of, rather than in spite of, limitations: a fixed number of pages at a team's disposal and on each one a restricted amount of space to cram with fresh enthusiasm; an immovable deadline to hit each month and a constant clock-is-ticking pressure to make everything count.

Physical restrictions of printed publications force editorial teams to make brave calls regarding the games and gaming features that are included. Most visible of all, the cover story counts for so much – not only, ideally, promising an exclusive inside track on the hottest thing around, but doing so in a way that conveys the attitude of everything else found inside.

What I've always found to be the fun part about games magazines is that what you do find inside often bears no resemblance to other lifestyle publications, with templates tossed out of the window to encapsulate the nature of the experience unique to each game. *C&VG's Mario 64*, *NiGHTS* and *Panzer Dragoon* pages were personal highlights – *Haynes Repair Manual* meets magical kingdoms. You won't see any such artistic explosion on a website because page-elements are stuck to a grid.

One last sign of the times that influenced how magazines came together throughout the Eighties and Nineties was the culture of working together in an office, whereas now it's not only website teams that work remotely (from home). A bunch of lads and lasses serving time on impossible schedules for months or years on end became as tight-knit as a sports team, sharing the creative spark of a rock band while observing the regimented realities of a military unit. A chap who I enjoy chatting to on Twitter (Steve Turner, @gamesbloke) recently pointed out that "there was a period of time in the early to mid-Nineties where you had writers that you wanted to be mates with. That's gone now." Great mags were/are the voices of those teams, thrilled to be in their privileged position to share.

Finally the secret sauce, often overlooked, undervalued and all-but outmoded today, is the anticipation associated with a new issue balanced with the length of time that it satisfies such expectation. For example, *Edge* maintains a degree of mystique to this day – even with so much information widely available online – teasing us with its timeless Next Month pages.

On a good month, magazines drip-feed a perfect snapshot of where our attention is best focussed – a memorable guide to what's important from a team that you've grown to love over time… kind of like **Retro Gamer**.

retrodiary

13 September – 10 October

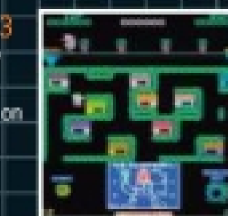
>> A month of retro events both past and present



17 September 1993
■ The first 32-bit console released in Europe appears, the Amiga CD32. It is also the first to be discontinued…

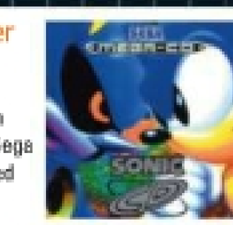


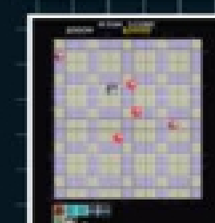
17 September 2013
■ Rockstar Games' hotly anticipated *Grand Theft Auto V* is due for release on PS3 and Xbox 360



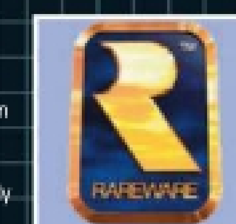
20 September 1982
■ The arcade coin-op *Blue Print*, designed by Ashby, is released by Jaleco.

23 September 1993
■ Sonic The Hedgehog stars in *Sonic CD* on the Sega Mega-CD, released first in Japan.





27 September 1985
■ Namco releases the coin-op game *Motos*, in which you must bump your enemies off the playfield. It's essentially dodgems in space.



24 September 2002
■ Microsoft acquires the videogames developer Rare Ltd, formerly known as Ultimate Play The Game. Yours for just $375 million.



24 September 2001
■ The wonderful action-adventure *Ico* is released on PS2 by Sony.



24 September 1992
■ Enjoy fisticuffs of the coin-op variety with the arcade release of SNK's *Art Of Fighting*.



27 September 2013
■ Electronic Arts is due to release *FIFA 14* on PlayStation 3 and 4 as well as Xbox 360.



29 September 2000
■ BioWare develops and Interplay publishes *Baldur's Gate II: Shadows Of Amn* in Europe for PC.



29 September 2006
■ Planet Moon Studios' third-person shooter *Infected* is released on Sony's PSP across Europe.



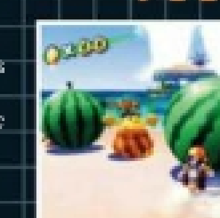
30 September 1997
■ *Total Annihilation*, the real-time strategy game, is released on PC by GT Interactive.



6 October 1990
■ The Sega Game Gear handheld console is officially launched, starting with Japan.



5 October 1987
■ LucasFilm releases its point-and-click graphic adventure game *Maniac Mansion* on the Apple II and Commodore 64.



4 October 2002
■ *Super Mario Sunshine* is released across Europe on the Nintendo GameCube.



1 October 2009
■ Sony releases the PSP Go handheld console in Europe and America. No UMD drive this time though…



7 October 1983
■ The Memotech MTX500 is released. Big, black, bold and beautiful… with very little software support.



7 October 2003
■ Nokia releases the N-Gage, a mobile phone/handheld gaming device mash-up. It fails to impress…



8 October 2004
■ The open-world platform game *Crash Twinsanity* is unleashed in Europe on the PS2 by Vivendi.

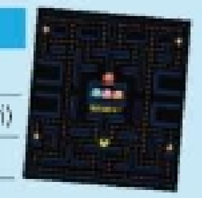


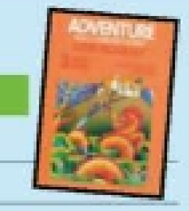
10 October 2013
■ New issue of **Retro Gamer** hits the streets.

BACK TO THE EIGHTIES

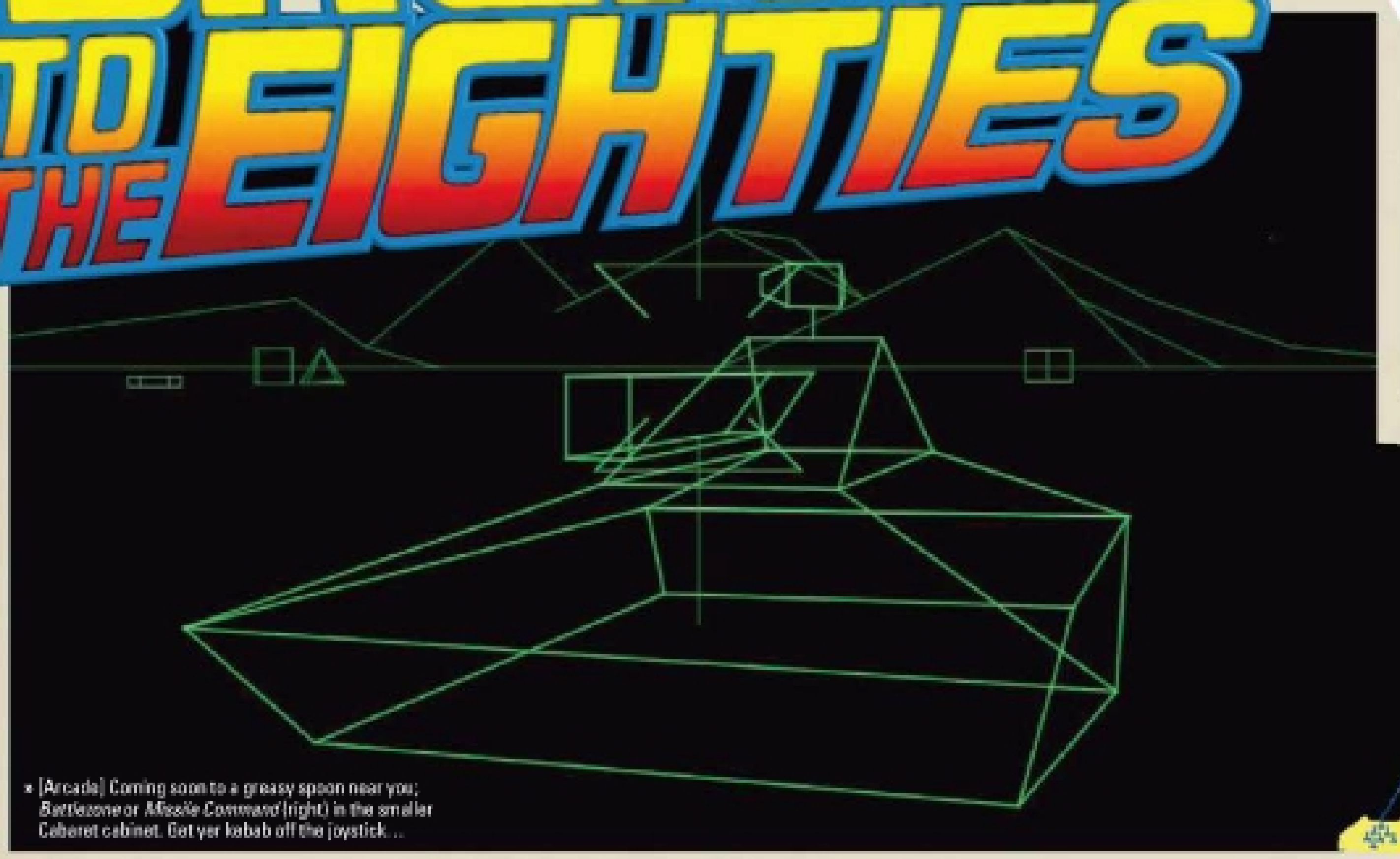
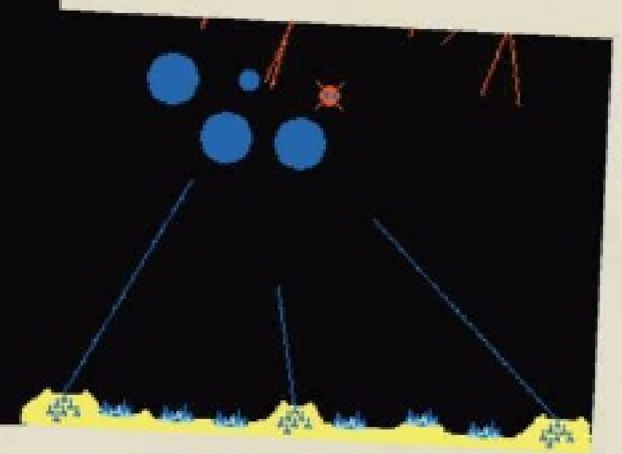
CHARTS

JANUARY 1981



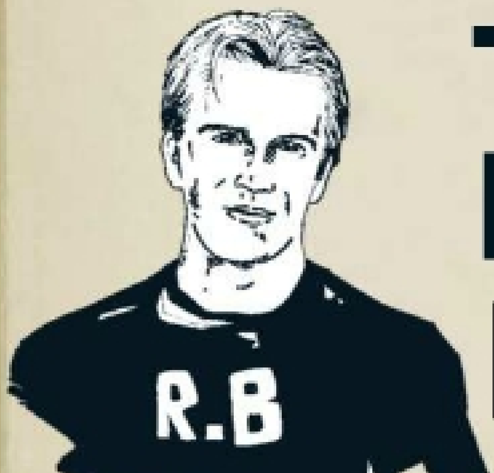



ARCADE	GAME & WATCH	ATARI 2600	MUSIC
1 Pac-Man (Namco)	1 Fire (Nintendo)	1 Adventure (Atari)	1 Imagine (John Lennon)
2 Missile Command (Atari)	2 Manhole (Nintendo)	2 Circus Atari (Atari)	2 Antmusic (Adam & The Ants)
3 Asteroids (Atari)	3 Vermin (Nintendo)	3 Dragster (Activision)	3 Happy Xmas (War Is Over) (John & Yoko)
4 Battlezone (Atari)	4 Judge (Nintendo)	4 Pele's Soccer (Atari)	4 Woman (John Lennon)
5 Moon Cresta (Nichibutsu)	5 Flagman Nintendo)	5 Othello (Atari)	5 Stop The Cavalry (Jona Lewie)

» [Arcade] Coming soon to a greasy spoon near you; *Battlezone* or *Missile Command* (right) in the smaller Cabaret cabinet. Get yer kebab off the joystick…

THE LATEST NEWS FROM JANUARY 1981



JANUARY 1981 – it's cabaret time at Atari, Vtech goes educational, Dodge 'Em arrives on the 2600, Pulsar vies for your loose change in coin-op land and Atari goes holoptic with the Cosmos. Richard Burton isn't here, it's a hologram…

In an interesting move by Atari, it announced that it would start introducing a new size of arcade coin-op cabinet called the Cabaret, which was a smaller version of a full-size upright machine.

Having a much smaller footprint than your standard coin-op, the Cabaret was targeting small businesses that struggled with limited floor space. Videogaming and arcade gaming meant huge business, so now even establishments with minimal room could reap the benefits of the coin-op gaming boom… as would Atari, presumably…

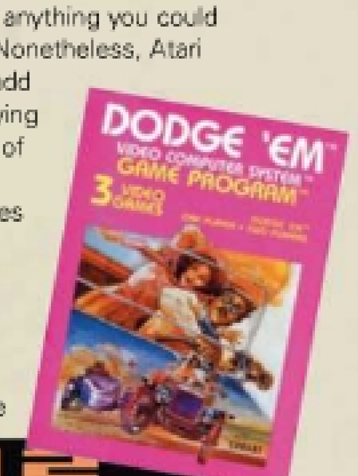
The first games available on the Cabaret cabinet list were *Battlezone*, *Missile Command* and *Asteroids*.

Vtech, makers of LCD and LED handheld games revealed that it was to preview its first tabletop electronic toy at the New York Toy Fair the following month. *Lesson One* was a tabletop version of its first ever educational game, the *Computron*, a book-style game that was influenced by Texas Instruments' *Speak & Spell*, another popular educational handheld used for developing basic spelling, maths and word recognition.

Lesson One sold extremely well, and Vtech went on to become a key player in the educational electronic gaming market. *Lesson One* was re-released in 1989 with updated casing and software.

Atari had some major hardware news that would have gamers parping in their trousers with methane-fuelled excitement. Atari announced that it would be previewing its latest console, the Atari Cosmos, at the New York Toy Fair.

The console's selling point was the use of holography in its games. Unfortunately, the games wouldn't be a true 3D holographic representation, more a series of moving LED lights in a grid pattern behind a transparent holographic picture. This picture acted more as a piece of window dressing than anything you could actually interact with. Nonetheless, Atari thought that it would add more depth to the playing field, giving the sense of an environment rather than the usual flat series of lights that tabletop games all followed.



The Cosmos was also relatively powerful. It had two microprocessors inside its plastic underbelly; one to run the LEDs and another accounting for the sound, which was reportedly very realistic and crystal clear.

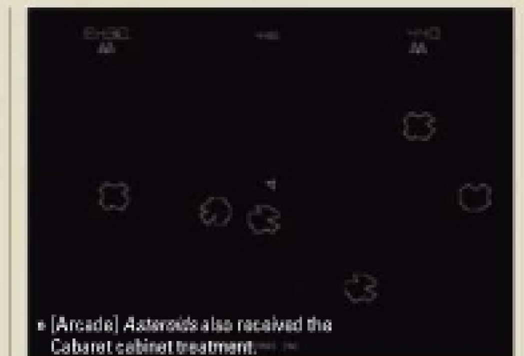
Eight games were to be released, including titles such as *Superman*, *Asteroids*, *Space Invaders* and *Road Runner*, which were expected to be priced at around ten dollars each. The price was kept so low due to the cartridge being little more than a big plastic key.

The Cosmos was pre-programmed with all eight games, meaning that you could buy the game pack containing the cartridge case that allowed access to the game, complete with the appropriate holographic backdrop. It was something of a unique move on Atari's part.

The Cosmos was developed by Allan Alcorn, Roger Hector and Harry Jenkins, and their faith in the holoptics, as Atari called it, was unwavering. Sadly, the president of Atari, Ray Kassar, thought otherwise, despite some strong indications at the Toy Fair that the Cosmos would sell well. Pre-orders for the console just from the one viewing at the show were reportedly as high as 8,000 units.



» [Atari 2600] *Dodge 'Em* was like a cross between *Pac-Man* and a driving game. Simple stuff, but a great little two-player game.



» [Arcade] *Asteroids* also received the Cabaret cabinet treatment.

Having spent considerable time, money and resources on the Cosmos, with the project first starting way back in 1978, the project was cancelled within touching distance of an official release. Despite several hundred empty console casings, packaging boxes and promotional items such as flyers being produced for shows and distributional sales packs, the Atari Holoptics laboratory was closed and the Cosmos was shelved.

Reasons for the Cosmos pull-out varied, from reports that Ray Kassar thought the project to be too risky and that consumers wouldn't be ready for such an innovative product, to simply that the tabletop gaming market was slowing down dramatically with TV games and consoles becoming more popular. Others thought that the promise of holographic games was such a lure that, when it became common knowledge that the games would prove to be flashing LEDs behind a plastic overlay, interest wavered.

In spite of three years of development, there are very few instances of Atari Cosmos items in general circulation. There are reportedly three empty tabletop shells and only two working Cosmos models in existence, but you would expect to have to sell a kidney and your first born child to fund the purchase. The holographic game overlays appear infrequently on internet auction sites and can be snagged for up to £100 a piece.

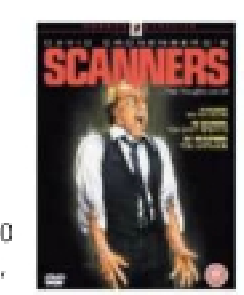
A cheaper gaming alternative from Atari would've been the Atari 2600 game *Dodge 'Em*. It was part maze game, part driving, as you swerved and negotiated your way around a four-lane maze collecting dots while avoiding the other cars intent on crashing into you. Once the maze was cleared it was straight on to the next. Simple yet fun, you could play against the computer opponent or take on a friend and it was reasonably priced at £16.95.

Pulsar was released in arcades this month. Produced by Sega and Gremlin Industries, *Pulsar* was a top down maze game which saw you take control of a tank that had to acquire keys to open gateways to the next level while avoiding any maze dwelling nasties, all before your limited fuel supplies ran out.

Each key was a different colour and, once collected, your tank also changed to that colour. You can then get more points for shooting nasties of that same colour. Later levels feature several keys and moving mazes, and although simple to pick up and play, *Pulsar* did have a naive charm not unlike an early Sinclair Spectrum game. Maybe the fact that *Pulsar* ran on a Z80 processor had something to do with it…

JANUARY WORLD NEWS

12 January saw American television air the first episode of prime-time soap opera *Dynasty*. Featuring the well-off Carrington family, it was pitched as a direct competitor to the other big soap opera of the time, *Dallas*. It starred John Forsythe as Blake Carrington, Linda Evans as his current wife Krystle and Joan Collins as his malicious former wife, Alexis Carrington Colby. It ran for over eight years, spanning an impressive 220 episodes. A spin-off series, *The Colbys*, aired in 1985, but it never received the same acclaim as *Dynasty*.



14 January saw some schlocky cinema action thanks to the world premiere of David Cronenberg's movie, *Scanners*. It starred Michael Ironside and Stephen Lack as the most powerful scanners, individuals who could use psychic powers to inflict pain and control on others. Ironside's character, Darryl Revok, ran an underground scanner organisation that wanted to take over the world. Much fighting and plenty of head-popping action ensued…

15 January saw more television goodness arrive in the form of the superb *Hill Street Blues*. The fictional American police drama followed the lives and work of a police precinct and fast became essential television viewing, with it picking up many awards during its six year, seven series run of 146 episodes. A mere ten years later, Krisalis produced a reasonably playable Amiga and Atari ST game based on the show.

21 January saw more crimson spillages with the premiere of *The Howling*, which featured a community inhabited by strange residents and a forest full of werewolves. It starred Dee Wallace and Patrick Macnee.

THIS MONTH IN…

COIN CONNECTION

Coin Connection featured a small article on Atari Ireland, the facility in Tipperary where the bulk of European coin-op machines were manufactured and distributed. It also touched upon the forthcoming release of *Red Baron*, a World War II flight simulation which used the same graphics system as *Battlezone*.



ANALOG

It was issue one of *Analog*, running at a flimsy 46 pages. In the news section it reported on the progression of the Atari Cosmos tabletop console, its use of holoptics and the impending releases of *Asteroids* and *Missile Command* on the trusty old Atari 2600.



BYTE

Byte finally reviewed Sinclair's ZX80 computer. Originally due out early 1980, it had arrived in the autumn. By that time the price had dipped under $200, which Clive Sinclair used as a selling point. *Byte* found the ZX80 to be "high performance, low cost and best used for learning the concepts of programming".





» [Arcade] Sega/Gremlin's uncomplicated game of shooting enemies and unlocking doors was more testing than it looked.

BACK TO THE NINETIES





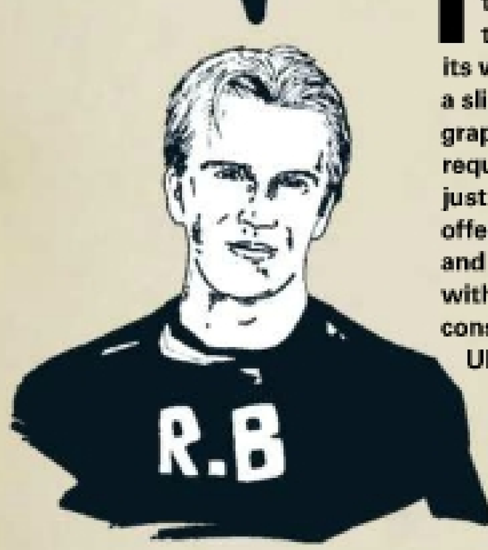
» [Sega Saturn] An exclusive 3D *Sonic* game just for the Sega Saturn? Nope – it's been cancelled. Blub.

» The Game Boy Pocket versus Game Boy original. The question is – what do you do if you don't have any pockets??



THE LATEST NEWS FROM JULY 1996

JULY 1996 – Game Boy shrinks, N64 Turok delayed, Saturn NiGHTS Into Dreams released, Sonic X-Treme sinks and Phantasmagoria 2 stinks. Richard Burton gets disembowelled yet again…



If you found the original Nintendo Game Boy a bit on the chunky side there was good news, as a smaller, thinner, lighter handheld was on its way – the Game Boy Pocket. It had a slightly larger screen that showed graphics in true black and white and required fewer batteries, running on just two AAAs rather than four AAs, offering up to ten hours of gaming. Oh, and all its games were still compatible with its older, fatter brother. Japanese consumers got first dibs with a USA/UK release following later.

Coming soon to the newly released Nintendo 64 was a promising game from Acclaim, namely *Turok: Dinosaur Hunter*. It also had the honour of being the first game for the N64 developed by a third party.

However, development wasn't without its sticking points, and the proposed September launch of the title looked unlikely. After play testing, Acclaim decided that the game wasn't sufficiently playable and fell short of what it had envisaged quality-wise. Acclaim delayed the release to tinker with the gameplay and polish out the rougher parts of the game, finally letting it loose in February.

The extra time spent proved worthwhile, with *Turok* eventually selling over 1.5 million units, an impressive figure. Its good showing helped boost sales of the Nintendo 64 console but also kept Acclaim's financial woes at bay, arguably saving the ailing company. Such was the critical response to *Turok* that it became a long-running and lucrative franchise – which is now a bit rubbish. Oh well…

Japanese Sega Saturn owners were positively throbbing in anticipation with the news that Sega were releasing *NiGHTS Into Dreams* on 5 July.

The aim of this action adventure game, designed by the team behind *Sonic The Hedgehog*, was to stop Wizeman The Wicked from taking Ideya, the physical forms of human energies and personality represented by coloured orbs. Wizeman is planning to use their energy to leave his domain and enter our own world.

After choosing between two children, Claris or Elliot, you had to embark on a 3D free-roaming journey to collect their lost Ideya. Along the way the pair meet the jester-esque Nights who works for Wizeman, but rebels and plots with the children to defeat his former boss.

Entering the Ideya Palace near the start of a level introduces the side-scrolling flying sequence that *NiGHTS* has become famous for. You had to gather more Ideya and fly through large airborne rings while battling a selection of henchman throughout each stage and a series of imaginative bosses. It's worth noting that your flying time is limited, and contact with an enemy loses more time. Eventually you'll fall to the ground, returning to your chosen child.

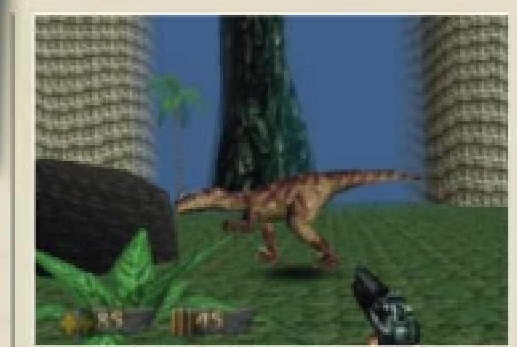
The graphics and soundtrack in *NiGHTS Into Dreams* were both pretty outstanding. The flying/collecting sequences featuring Nights were remarkably good with superbly designed graphics, all of which ran fluidly and really conveyed the sensation of flying. This was helped in no small part by its regularly shifting camera angles. The game itself was fast-paced, graphically and aurally stunning and a pleasure to play.



» [Sega Saturn] Strange, beautiful, atmospheric and extremely playable – *NiGHTS Into Dreams* was superb.

Star Ocean was another game to be released first in Japan that sadly remained a Japanese exclusive, due to the developing company, Enix, closing its American studio shortly before the game's development was complete. The Super Nintendo action role-playing game used a top-down perspective and was well received by critics and gamers alike, becoming the first in a seven game series.

Star Ocean was also just one of two games – the other being *Street Fighter Alpha 2* – to use a special compression chip, the S-DD1, in its cartridge to compress gaming data. This was due to the detailed graphics used on the SNES and the extensive voice acting implemented throughout the gameplay. The compression chip also doubled as a copy protection system, making games that employed it far more difficult to copy and emulate.



» [Nintendo 64] *Turok: Dinosaur Hunter* did wonders for the N64 and also for its development company Acclaim.

Controversial release of the month was *Phantasmagoria 2: A Puzzle Of Flesh* by Sierra Entertainment on PC, a sequel to the contentious original. The interactive movie game leant heavily on the psychological element of its horror theme making the point-and-click adventure a harrowing journey. The game contained extreme violence and sexual content and was strictly censored in several countries while being banned in many others.

You controlled the seemingly dull Curtis Craig, an office worker with a hidden past. He had been institutionalised a year prior and was now suffering from hallucinations of horror and gore in his office environment. A co-worker was later found brutally murdered in his office cubicle. More gore and murders followed, and it seemed that the company that you work for is linked to the mysterious Project Threshold and Dimension X…

Sadly, the game was a clunky, linear affair that could be completed quickly. The sheer amount of Full Motion Video in the game meant that actual gameplay and interactivity within the game suffered greatly. The storyline was also criticised, particularly for the amount of sexual content inherent in it, including instances of sadomasochism and rape. The censors also marked it down for use of the F-word and a disembowelment scene. Censors, reviewers and gamers all gave *Phantasmagoria 2: A Puzzle Of Flesh* a wide berth, and quite rightly so.

In addition to *NiGHTS*, Sega Saturn owners were also looking forward to the return of *Sonic The Hedgehog*, who was due to make his first original Sega Saturn appearance in *Sonic X-Treme*. With a Christmas release mooted, development was progressing at a snail's pace. The original game engine had been viewed by concerned Sega Japan representatives, who were fairly unimpressed with the progress made.

They requested changes to be made that, realistically, put the proposed deadline out of reach. When one project director quit and the other suffered a long-term illness, it was decided that the entire *Sonic X-Treme* project would be cancelled. Still, at least we have *Sonic R*…

THIS MONTH IN…

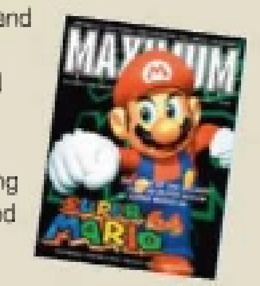
MEAN MACHINES SEGA

A trend becoming increasingly popular on consoles was the plentiful releases of retro gaming compilations. Forthcoming titles included *Sega Ages* (Sega Saturn), *Atari Classics* (Mega Drive) and *Willams Arcade Classics* (PlayStation). Retro gaming was as popular back in the Nineties as it is now it seems…



MAXIMUM

It was issue seven of the glossy magazine and, sadly, it was also the last. *Maximum* would be "taking a break" before coming back slimmer, cheaper and more 32-bit orientated. *Maximum* also touched on retro gaming and particularly emulation, looking at ways of playing aged Spectrum, C64 and Colecovision titles.



AMIGA POWER

Amiga Power ran a number of interesting features in issue 63. In addition to explaining why film licences should be strangled at birth, there was also an excellent article that explored the possible connection between Amiga games and Michael Caine. Disappointment of the month was the 20 per cent scoring *Valhalla 3*.



JULY WORLD NEWS

5 July saw the UK release of *Mission: Impossible* starring Tom Cruise as Ethan Hunt, a member of the Impossible Mission Force, an independent espionage agency.

A mission in Prague goes disastrously wrong, the team is compromised and all of them are seemingly killed. IMF believes Hunt to be a mole who sabotaged the mission. He goes on the run and recruits some former IMF agents with a plan to clear his name.

Action, adventure, twists, fish tanks, exploding chewing gum and a helicopter stuck to a high speed train going through the Channel Tunnel – pretty much all you need for a summer action blockbuster.

10 July saw the awful news that Lin Russell and her six-year-old daughter Megan had been murdered near to their home in Kent after walking home from school through woodland. Nine-year-old Josie Russell was found with severe head injuries but made an almost full recovery and helped police with their enquiries. 38-year-old Michael Stone was later arrested, charged and found guilty. He received three life sentences.

19 July saw the UK release of the Adam Sandler comedy *Happy Gilmore*. He played an ice hockey player that finds out he has the most powerful golfing drive in the world. He joins the PGA tour in an attempt to win the prize money to save his grandmother's house, but his hot-tempered ice hockey attitude remains…

CHARTS

JULY 1996



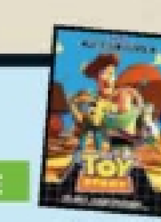
SUPER NINTENDO

1. Donkey Kong Country 2: Diddy's Kong Quest (Nintendo)
2. Killer Instinct (Nintendo)
3. Yoshi's Island (Nintendo)
4. FIFA Soccer '96 (EA)
5. PGA Tour Golf '96 (THQ)



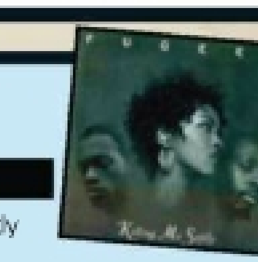
SEGA SATURN

1. Street Fighter Alpha (Virgin Games)
2. Panzer Dragoon Zwei (Sega)
3. Sega Rally (Sega)
4. Virtua Cop (Sega)
5. NFL: Quarterback Club (Sega)



SEGA MEGA DRIVE

1. Toy Story (Sega)
2. FIFA Soccer '96 (EA)
3. Sonic And Knuckles (Sega)
4. Australian Rugby League (EA)
5. Ecco The Dolphin 2: Tides Of Time (Sega)



MUSIC

1. Killing Me Softly (Fugees)
2. Wannabe (Spice Girls)
3. Born Slippy (Underworld)
4. Forever Love (Gary Barlow)
5. Mysterious Girl (Peter Andre)

retro GAMER.net READER'S REVIVAL

Chuck Norris Superkicks

WE WISH CHUCK NORRIS WOULD DESTROY IT WITH A SUPER KICK

#66

» XONOX » ATARI 2600 » 1983

I really, really want to like this game. Any game starring the hardest man that there ever was and that there ever will be has surely got to be good… right? The answer, unfortunately, is no.

What really lets *Chuck Norris Superkicks* down are its controls. They're bad. They're really, really bad. You can play this game hundreds of times and never improve. When you first appear on the fighting playfield it's just you (Chuck) and the bad guy. You charge at him, fingers poised on the joystick to roundhouse kick the mother in the face. You approach, you're ready and then, POW, you're on the floor. And then you're on the floor again. You get up again, but now – from nowhere – the baddie has got a gun. He shoots you – you go down. He shoots you again – you die and wind up at the start. And that's how it goes, over and over until you finally, well… game over…

I remember being so excited to get this game only to become disheartened with it. No matter how quick I thought I was, the henchman was always quicker. Even when I forced myself to sit down for a proper session the best I ever did was get to the second level, where there were two henchmen – both quicker than me – meaning that I died and went back to the start even quicker.

I'm sure there are folk out there – folk willing to put the time in – who really enjoy this game, but for me, it's just not any fun.

RETROBATE PROFILE

» **NAME:** BILL MATTHEWS
» **JOINED:** 3 MAY 2012
» **LOCATION:** EDINBURGH, UK
» **OCCUPATION:** SO BORING IT WILL BRING TEARS TO YOUR EYES
» **FAVE GAME SYSTEM:** ATARI 2600



Shadowrun

It pushed the SNES's capabilities to its limits and had a fanbase eagerly awaiting an adaptation of their beloved tabletop RPG. Denis Murphy breaks down the story behind a cyberpunk classic

This year saw the release of *Shadowrun Returns*, one of the many success stories that have emerged from the creation of Kickstarter. However, though Hairbrained Schemes has brought its vision of *Shadowrun* to fruition 24 years after its creation as a tabletop RPG, Beam Software created the first videogame incarnation of *Shadowrun* for the SNES back in 1993, a title that blended both the RPG and action genres – as well as reality and the virtual world.



Originally pitched by Gregg Barnett in conjunction with Jordan Weisman of FASA, and accepted by Data East, *Shadowrun* was in limbo during development due to his sudden departure from the project. With Gregg absent, the game was heavily reworked during development, as one developer puts it, "to make it actually achievable." After slightly deviating from Gregg's original vision for it to have a "strong noir look", one major change to the gameplay was the removal of the ability to use a motorcycle to traverse the city. Instead, a train system was implemented, thus cutting down on excessive sprites – a problem that was persistent during the game's development.

Despite seeing changes throughout development from Gregg's originally accepted pitch, the main focus of *Shadowrun* remained; to deliver a game that both fans of the tabletop RPG and newcomers could enjoy. Game designer on the project after Gregg departed, Paul Kidd, reveals his appreciation of tabletop RPGs, "I'm a long time RPG enthusiast. I knew of the *Shadowrun* game (though at that time, I wasn't a player myself). I had my own RPG games published out in the marketplace (*Albedo*, *Lace & Steel*), so I wanted to do a good job for my fellow RPG fans." Despite admittedly not being an active player of *Shadowrun* himself at the time, Paul instantly saw the possibilities that the universe offered and was determined to get its videogame translation correct. "It offered a chance to do adventures that operated on both the physical level, and also on the plane of cyberspace," he explains. "Plus, most adventures up to that point had been about individual characters. *Shadowrun* was about assembling teams." With the team assembled and a tabletop RPG fan as its lead, *Shadowrun*'s development went into full swing.



» [SNES] At the beginning of the game, Jake is gunned down. Your job is to find out why.



» [SNES] There are clues throughout the game alluding as to why you were put on a hit-list.

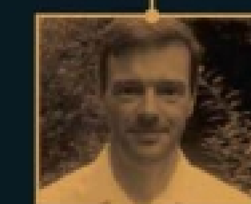


» [SNES] Seattle 2050, the cyberpunk setting of *Shadowrun*, which echoes the opening scene from *Blade Runner*.

The game opens in Seattle, Washington in the year 2050, amid a sprawling cyberpunk backdrop. The story to *Shadowrun* was simple, yet effective. After being gunned down and left for dead, the player takes command of courier Jake Armitage and must find out who the mysterious 'Drake' is, the individual who ordered his execution. However, the first issue was whether the world the original tabletop RPG envisioned could be physically realised within the confines of a simple SNES cartridge.

Creating *Shadowrun*'s world was no easy task. The choice to present the game from an isometric perspective was, in part, picked to give the illusion of a fully 3D world, seeing as such an environment on the SNES wasn't feasible at that time. As system programmer Andrew Bailey puts it, "We wanted the game to be in 3D, not top-down as in other RPGs. A room-based isometric view was designed. The overall graphical design was highly tailored by the systems hardware, including the scrolling of two screens and also the number of levels of items that could be overlapped." For a game with its feet placed firmly in the realm of a rule-based tabletop RPG, Beam Software looked to Justin Halliday, who served as map constructor on the project. "To be honest, there wasn't really an approach or a plan," he recalls. "Between us, Andrew Buttery and I were in charge of making all of the maps for the game. As is always the case, we were working on the maps at the same time the game engine and the map design tool were being created." Also praising the freedom given to him during development, Justin says, "Most of the time, we were given a great deal of freedom to create the maps. We worked with the artists on elements for each of the areas, like the city streets, the docks or the ship. The most important thing was for us to try to find new and interesting ways to use the limited artwork we had."

Despite limitations, Justin found realising the world of *Shadowrun* on the SNES rather frustrating, lamenting, "We were always under the pump on *Shadowrun*, and lots of parts of the game were thrown together, cut out, or bodged together! We were always running out of memory, and we begged the publisher for a 12 megabit cartridge but they wouldn't commit to the extra memory. So, the artists would be constantly revising all of their artwork to reduce the character counts. That's why the helicopter at the volcano is viewed front-on, so we could flip the left and right sides, and why all of the baddies have the same corpse…" Though *Shadowrun* did have a number of its character and enemy sprites downgraded which impacted the game's intended visual flair, Justin is eager to call both the actual engine and the in-game tools "fantastic".





IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** DATA EAST
- » **DEVELOPER:** BEAM SOFTWARE, LASER BEAM ENTERTAINMENT
- » **RELEASED:** 1993
- » **PLATFORM:** SNES
- » **GENRE:** ACTION-RPG

> **"I wanted to do a good job for my fellow RPG fans"**
> Paul Kidd



» [SNES] Rather than being zombies, the Ghouls in *Shadowrun* are the product of a mutated virus.

Being one of two programmers behind the project, and also responsible for architectural design and the PC tools which allowed the building of the worlds, Andrew explains how he and his fellow programmer worked their way around certain graphical limitations.

"The SNES did not provide an arbitrary bitmap rendering system as is common today, but used a system of character generators and sprites," he begins. "This meant the backgrounds had to be built on a rigid 64 by 32 grid of eight by eight cells. The hardware provided three layers with which characters (implemented using sprites) could move, but this wasn't enough. We used a special hardware trick called 'sprite masking' which was actually a hardware bug that let us cut holes in sprites where the characters were, so we could make a sprite appear to go behind a pillar for example. This required a complex database, so the PC tool allowed designers to construct levels from modular parts from the artists and build 3D information (floor is flat, wall is upright etc). The levels would then be compiled into a single database so that all the graphic information could be shared in a virtual character set. The runtime building of the levels from this database was written by Darren Bremner, all in glorious assembler code." Additionally, Andrew goes on to elaborate on how the game was put together. "All the game systems were written in assembler code, and most other



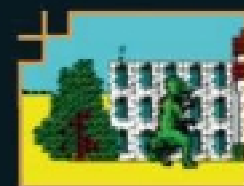


» [SNES] Having quite a large back story in the tabletop RPG, rock star Maria Mercurial makes a brief appearance.

games for the SNES were completely written in assembler code. There was little use of languages such as C, due partly to the little runtime RAM available. There was only 128K of RAM into which [we could] decompress art and audio, as well as run the game and its logic. However, we didn't want to have to write all the game logic in Assembler, it would be too error prone and tedious. As other languages were heavy on RAM usage we designed our own language, which we compiled to a virtual stack-based code that the runtime code would interpret and execute. The language was designed so the compiler could pre-compute the *exact* workspace size (or stack) a script would need down to the byte, so the runtime could allocate exactly the space required (a concept I learnt from work with transputers). This let us us run multiple scripts for all the characters in a scene in very little space, a few K. I wrote the compiler and Darren wrote the runtime."

As far as citing inspiration for *Shadowrun* beyond its obvious source material, all three developers come to the same conclusion – William Gibson's classic 1984 cyberpunk novel *Neuromancer*, the novel that defined the cyberpunk genre. Justin elaborates, while also mentioning another somewhat unlikely source of inspiration, "There's a huge amount of *Neuromancer* in *Shadowrun*, as there was in all of the cyberpunk genre. The other influence that players have probably noticed was *Minesweeper*, the time-killing puzzler that shipped with Windows. When it came to the hacking mini-game, no one could think of how to do it until someone came up with the idea of using *Minesweeper*'s mechanics for the hacking."

Beyond the cyberpunk city setting, the player also had the ability to enter the 'Matrix', a virtual world within *Shadowrun* accessible using a cyberdeck. Created primarily by Graeme Scott, it was presented to be visually different from the main game and featured a new style of gameplay to emphasise the gulf between the real world and this virtual cyberspace. Paul notes, "We had to keep it as simple as possible, given the time constraints and the memory constraints of the machine." Yet despite talk of the system's shortcomings to a certain degree, Andrew was quite confident that it could handle *Shadowrun*. He recalls, "The SNES was a great machine, especially after working on its predecessor the NES. Its very non-orthogonal hardware always made it a challenge on how to design a game around it. It was probably the most powerful graphic chip of its type, even compared to the AGB. It not only had a CPU whose speed was measured in the low MHz but a host of special DMA tricks (giving us the famous Mode 7) and excellent audio that, for the first time, allowed a musician to actually compose real music for a videogame. Overall, the SNES allowed us to deliver a console game which, for the time, didn't have to comprise on its quality due to hardware limitations."



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

THE MUNCHER
(PICTURED)
SYSTEM: C64, ZX SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1988

THE WAY OF THE EXPLODING FIST
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 1985

THE HOBBIT
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 1982



» [SNES] Gun shops will provide you with various weapons, if your firearm level is high enough, that is.

However, there is one side to this story that will never be told again, and that is the first-hand account of Arthur Kakouris, project manager and additional game designer on the project. Arthur Kakouris passed away in September 2012, and the man who was known as 'Artie' to some of his friends is sadly missed and not forgotten. Justin reflects: "Arthur was a great friend, especially during *Shadowrun*. He was the sort of producer and designer who put everything into the game, and made it a pleasure to work on. We'd go out at 11pm for Slurpees for the team, and head to Pizza Hut every Tuesday for all-you-can-eat pizza. Unfortunately, he was born with a heart defect and had open-heart surgery when he was around 20. Last year his heart finally gave out and he died." Paul also chimes in with his thoughts on the passing of a friend, telling us, "Arthur was a deeply serious and dedicated guy. What I loved about him was that you could just discuss an idea with him and let him go – he'd work away at it and something good would result." Andrew also shares his memories, and believes that *Shadowrun* meant quite a lot to Arthur. "Naturally I was deeply shocked and upset with Arthur's passing last year, as Arthur joined myself and Trevor Nuridin as an owner of Tantalus Entertainment over one-and-a-half decades ago. This was compounded by the fact I was on the other side on the world and couldn't attend his funeral. On *Shadowrun* Arthur did what he loved best, and that was game design. I believe he would have remembered [it] as one of the best projects he worked on."

> "Arthur did what he loved best, and that was game design"
> Andrew Bailey


» [SNES] Shadowrunner mercenaries can be hired and can range in types and classes.


» [SNES] Like in *Frogger*, at one point Jake must dodge cars. Getting hit causes a lot of damage.


» [SNES] The Cage is a brutal arena in which fights take place. Take part for good experience.

RECRUITING SHADOWRUNNERS

Finding hacking too difficult? You need to get yourself some friends…



Through its adaptation into a videogame, Beam Software was keen on having the game stay true to its tabletop roots. In *Shadowrun* the player could hire other Shadowrunners as backup throughout the game. They could be found in the many dingy bars of Seattle, and if a Shadowrunner died, they re-spawned back at where you found them. This let players experiment with different combinations, without the penalty of losing a potential ally forever. This addition of building up a team paid homage to the group-style gameplay of the tabletop RPG. The number that could be hired, and the length of time that they could stay with you, was dictated by the player's Charisma level; if your level was higher, you could save money on Shadowrunner hires. Additionally, there was one ally that would try and kill the player, resulting in quite an unexpected confrontation for unaware players.

A year after Beam Software released *Shadowrun*, another *Shadowrun* title hit the shelves, this time developed by BlueSky Software for the Sega Mega Drive, which was then followed by a Japanese take on the franchise in 1996 by Compile. It seems Beam Software hit a timely nerve but, despite a fantastic critical response to its *Shadowrun*, a direct sequel never materialised. In fact, despite a post-credits message promising a sequel, the team were adamant that it was never seriously discussed. Andrew does interject with a revealing story though, "The Japanese version was interesting. This was because it came to be proposed after we had finished the English version, and we were presented by the Japanese publisher with a big printout where they had reverse engineered the VRAM (graphic memory) for all the different screens, working out where the Japanese font could be fitted in. While it was an impressive piece of work, we didn't have the heart to tell them it was useless. This highlighted a difference between how we in the West (or South for Beam) worked differently to the East. While they allocated the space for the art by hand, we wrote systems to do this in code, so we simply added the Japanese font to a table and it was done."

As these three developers reminisce about their game, we had to ask, are there any secrets in *Shadowrun* that no one knows about? Surprisingly, two of them speak up. James lays out what hasn't been discovered for 20 years, saying "There is a cheat in the game, but I can't remember exactly how to do it. Basically, there is a flickering streetlight in the first street area after you wake up in the morgue. If you examine the Matchbox four times around the flickering light, you're teleported to a cheat room that contains a bunch of upgrades and gives access to all of the levels." However, Andrew also jumps in with an alternate take on it all: "There is an Easter Egg in the game, a certain dance around a lamppost in the main square that was put in for QA. I wish I could remember the actual cheat, but it is now 20 years ago." Conflicting accounts, certainly, but now a secret best explored by the retro gaming public…

20 years on, *Shadowrun* remains one of the SNES's strongest and most memorable Western titles, and certainly its best RPG. It combined a wonderful narrative, a gorgeous cyberpunk-laden setting and tied diverse and interesting gameplay together in one neat little package. Looking back, how do these developers view their work?

"I actually really like what we did," Paul remarks. "As other people produced games in following years, I could see the influence of *Shadowrun* through many of them." Justin also backs up Paul's feelings on the game, saying, "I'm still amazed we actually finished the game! We were a young team and were fortunate to be given the opportunity to work on a game that went on to become a minor classic!" Andrew on the other hand simply commends the efforts of all involved, intimating, "I regard *Shadowrun* as one of the best projects I have worked on. I think this is mainly because the entire team was really into the game and the concept and went that extra mile on each aspect of the game – design, art, scriptwriters and QA." It would appear that Hairbrained Schemes' new *Shadowrun* game has a lot to live up to…



» [SNES] Eventually Jake can use a Cyberdeck to enter the virtual world, the Matrix.


» [SNES] Some areas are more peaceful than others, but the game is generally a dangerous place.

SHADOWRUN RETURNS
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FROM TABLE TO COMPUTER

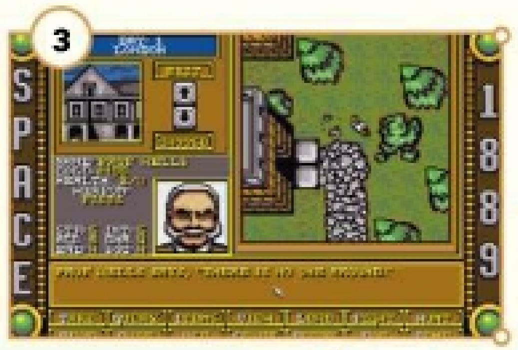
More classic RPGs that became fully-fledged videogames







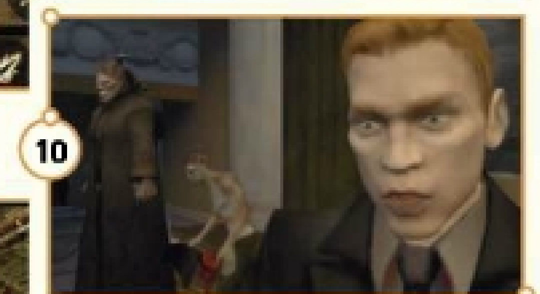














MECHWARRIOR

DEVELOPER: DYNAMIX
PUBLISHER: ACTIVISION
SYSTEM: MS-DOS, SHARP X68000
YEAR: 1989

1 *MechWarrior*, based upon the tabletop RPG of the same name, which is part of the *BattleTech* franchise, placed the player within the cockpit of a hulking mech, something that was quite interesting and new back in 1986. Despite the title, *MechWarrior* had much more to offer than standard mech-on-mech combat. Based around quite an impressive reputation system, the player could build relationships with the five Great Houses that could lead to opening up more missions to partake in. Spawning a whole slew of sequels and spin-offs, *MechWarrior* games have arguably become even more popular than their tabletop RPG source material.

MEGATRAVELLER 1: THE ZHODANI CONSPIRACY

DEVELOPER: PARAGON SOFTWARE
PUBLISHER: IN-HOUSE
SYSTEM: AMIGA, ATARI ST, MS-DOS
YEAR: 1990

2 Based on the tabletop RPG *Traveller*, this overlooked title gave the player a wonderful sense of freedom, despite receiving mixed reviews upon release. The player takes command of five adventurers as they try and save their civilisation, the Imperium, from the alien race known as the Zhodani. Containing eight solar systems and 28 planets to visit, *MegaTraveller*'s world is vast and interesting. While combat is lacking at times and some elements of its source material are missing, it does not take away from how innovative and daring this was for its time.

SPACE: 1889

DEVELOPER: PARAGON SOFTWARE
PUBLISHER: MICROPROSE SOFTWARE INC
SYSTEM: AMIGA, ATARI, MS-DOS
YEAR: 1990

3 Here's one that has gone under the radar for many. In *Space: 1889* you create five unique characters from scratch and set out on an epic adventure. Set in an alternate 19th Century Victorian Era that has already discovered space travel, the game takes the familiar and has a little fun. This merging of history and sci-fi is rather interesting and plays out exceptionally well as you encounter historic characters such as Jules Verne, Jack the Ripper and Rasputin, but with a twist. With the addition of being able to purchase spaceships on top of the familiar RPG formula, *Space: 1889* is an undiscovered gem.

REALMS OF ARKANIA: BLADE OF DESTINY

DEVELOPER: ATTIC ENTERTAINMENT SOFTWARE
PUBLISHER: US GOLD
SYSTEM: AMIGA, MS-DOS
YEAR: 1992

4 Though this year sees a remake of it, the original *Realms Of Arkania: Blade Of Destiny* – which is the first title in the *Northlands Trilogy* – should not be overlooked. Based upon the tabletop RPG *The Dark Eye*, the game is steeped heavily in lore and, in turn, does a great job at world building. Taking command of six characters, the player navigates through beautifully constructed 3D environments and battles fierce enemies. Complete with rather in-depth character customisation and a superbly detailed isometric battle view, *Realms Of Arkania: Blade Of Destiny* is a terrific start to a highly enjoyable trilogy.

SHADOWRUN

DEVELOPER: BLUESKY SOFTWARE
PUBLISHER: SEGA
SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE
YEAR: 1994

5 One year after Beam Software released its superb SNES adaptation of *Shadowrun*, BlueSky Software released its own take on the franchise. While it comes from the very same source material, it is a rather different beast compared to its Super Nintendo counterpart. With a fully customisable player-character right from the start, a cracking narrative, accessible combat and a wonderful portrayal of the 'Matrix' (which is arguably better than that of the SNES game), this is yet another excellent vision of the tabletop role-playing game. It takes a slightly different approach, but some might make a case for it being the superior adaptation of its source material.

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS: TOWER OF DOOM

DEVELOPER: CAPCOM
PUBLISHER: IN-HOUSE
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1996

6 Leave it to Capcom to take the *Dungeons & Dragons* franchise and turn it into a side-scrolling fighter. But you know what? It works, and it works amazingly well. Despite its odd choice of genre and a focus on fast, intense action, *Tower Of Doom* retains some of the hallmarks of a classic *Dungeons & Dragons* experience. Playable with up to four characters which include the Fighter, Dwarf, Cleric and Elf, and containing a massive array of attacks, actions and spells, *Tower Of Doom* is a surprisingly fresh and enjoyable approach to the series. It spawned its own sequel, *Shadow Over Mystara*. It's now available on Xbox 360, PS3 and PC.

BALDUR'S GATE

DEVELOPER: BIOWARE
PUBLISHER: BLACK ISLE STUDIOS, INTERPLAY ENTERTAINMENT
SYSTEM: PC, MAC OS
YEAR: 1998

7 *Baldur's Gate* is often listed as one of the greatest true RPG experiences to date. Taking place within the Forgotten Realms, one of the many *D&D* universes, *Baldur's Gate* is an in-depth and story-driven game for players who seek true adventure. Boasting an excellent dialogue system and diverse party-based combat, *Baldur's Gate* is actually based on *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons 2nd Edition* rules. It's an utter treat for players and non-players of *Dungeons & Dragons* alike and spawned a direct sequel, a number of expansions and a spin-off. For many, it is the starting point for those wishing to enter the world of *D&D*.

PLANESCAPE: TORMENT

DEVELOPER: BLACK ISLE STUDIOS
PUBLISHER: INTERPLAY ENTERTAINMENT
SYSTEM: PC
YEAR: 1999

8 For many gamers, *Torment* is the best Western RPG of all time, and it's easy to understand why once you become involved in its rich story. Helmed by Chris Avellone, the game placed the player in the role of The Nameless One, an immortal that has lived countless lives yet forgotten them all. Through exploring the city of Sigil, The Nameless One must reclaim memories of his past lives. With a focus on narrative instead of combat, *Planescape: Torment* is a tonic for the gamer weary of cheap thrills. Thought provoking and wonderfully realised, it's a must play, constantly maturing with each subsequent playthrough.

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS

DEVELOPER: BIOWARE
PUBLISHER: INFOGRAMES
SYSTEM: WINDOWS, LINUX, MAC OS X
YEAR: 2002

9 *Neverwinter Nights* was named after the original game of the same name by Stormfront Studios in 1991, which was the first graphical massively multiplayer online role-playing game ever. Whereas Bioware based *Baldur's Gate* on *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons 2nd Edition* rules, *Neverwinter Nights* used *3rd Edition* rules. It also boasted slick graphics that brought the world of the Forgotten Realms to life like never before and intuitive combat that kept gameplay fun and smart. *Neverwinter Nights* is one of the best trips through the world of *Dungeons & Dragons*, with a range of excellent creation tools for making your own role-playing adventures.

VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE – BLOODLINES

DEVELOPER: TROIKA GAMES
PUBLISHER: ACTIVISION
SYSTEM: WINDOWS
YEAR: 2004

10 Set within the universe of *World Of Darkness* by White Wolf Publishing, *Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines* begins with the death of the main character, only to be resurrected as a vampire. The player begins by choosing between multiple vampire clans, each with their own powers, personality and ability to steer the story in different ways. From there the player views Los Angeles from the eyes of vampire, completing missions across the city while along the way keeping up the Masquerade – a vampire law that prevents the human world from knowing about their very existence. A truly wonderful and atmospheric title.

A MOMENT WITH…

Burke Trieschmann

Composer of such classics such as Pandemonium, The Unholy War and The Horde, Burke Trieschmann speaks to Denis Murphy about his two decades' worth of work in the business



Who is Burke Trieschmann?

With musical roots that originated from working as a sound engineer and producer for various hip-hop and rap groups in the mid-Eighties, Burke Trieschmann entered the videogames industry in 1993 with his composition for *Crash N' Burn*. Since then, Burke has composed and sound designed for many well-known titles and even started his own production company, Open Door Productions.

Why did you start composing videogames?
Doing music and sound for games came about as a natural progression of following the music in my life and whatever situations came up along the way. I've always had an interest in learning and playing new instruments and also the technology behind recording and creating music.

How do you approach your work?
Before composing music or any sort of sound design, it's important to find a common language to communicate with the game designers and producers at the beginning of the project so it's clear what is needed, what style best compliments the gameplay and how many assets (variations, interactive functionality, etc) will need to be created to get you there. Usually a well designed game will have an Audio Design document as well.



[PlayStation] *Pandemonium* featured a great voice cast, spearheaded by actor/comedian Greg Proops.

What were you trying to achieve with your *Pandemonium* score?
Pandemonium was a very organic score. I tried to incorporate a more traditional and Celtic feel to the music that was fun, bouncy and subversive at the same time. One challenge was that the PlayStation needed to have the music bits in memory and triggered by small sequence files at run time. My goal was to take as many real performances of musicians playing traditional instruments and cut them up into smaller sampled bits that could be re-triggered by the sequence files to make variations of music. In effect, I was creating a musical instrument palette I could work with (and still stay in the memory restrictions of the PSone), that not only had single instrument samples but also bodhran, bouzouki, percussion, mandocello, violin, riffs and phrases that could give some life and feel to the soundtrack.



[PlayStation] Known as 2.5D, *Pandemonium* featured 3D graphics, but was played along a 2D plane. The game also used a mix of 3D models and 2D sprites.

Was *Pandemonium 3* ever planned?
The team that developed *Pandemonium 2* moved on to start another company, and Crystal Dynamics did not pursue another *Pandemonium*. I think a lot of focus was on other titles that they had been developing.

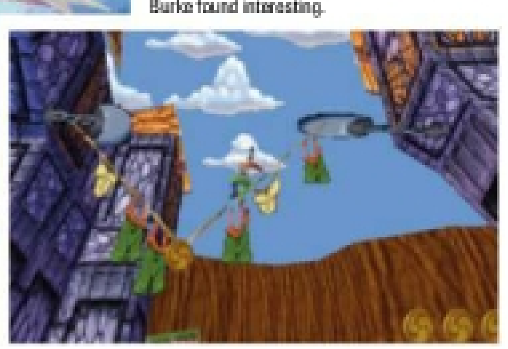
What's been your most enjoyable project to date?
Oh. So many, its hard to choose just one. The early soundtracks for *The Horde*, both *Pandemoniums* and *The Unholy War* were quite challenging and fun.

And what's your dream project?
One that is designed from the ground up to support high-end music and audio as an interactive, immersive and evolving score that both reacted to the game state, and the game state would react seamlessly to the music. Having the player be able to make music inside the game and save the results of their creative decisions. A game engine that could support high-end DSP effects on the fly, unlimited audio memory, surround support and a built-in set of instruments that could be used for scoring and creating sound effects. A game that was musically reactive and configurable to the player's style, emotional reactions and gameplay decisions. There are games out there that have come close to this, and as consoles and computers get more powerful, the audio will continue to improve.

However, I do think successful game music should not call too much attention to 'itself', but instead compliment and raise the gameplay experience to a higher level.

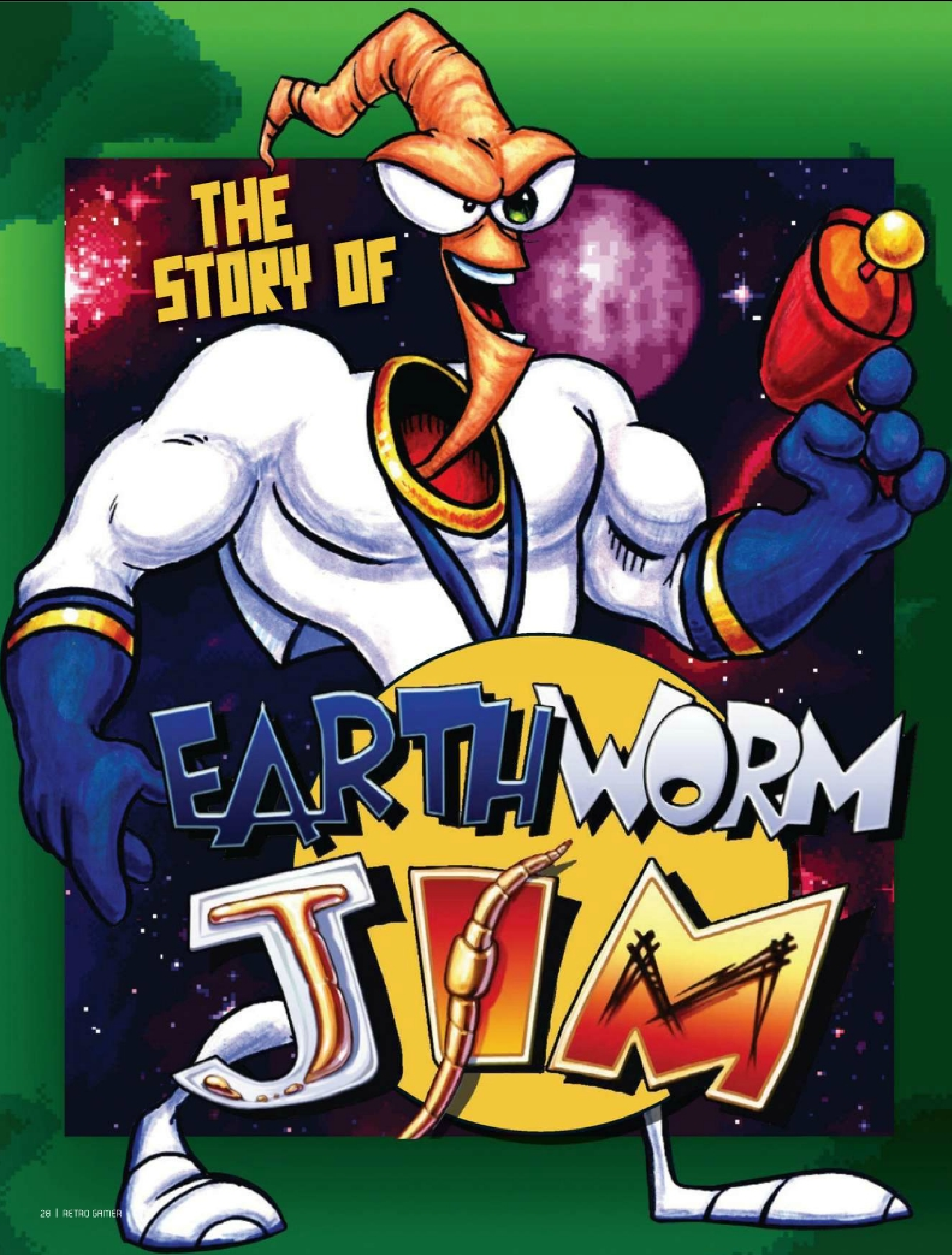


[PlayStation] *The Unholy War* was a highly underrated title that pitted players against each other and featured 16 unique characters to choose from.



[PlayStation] While similar in gameplay terms to its predecessor, *Pandemonium 2*'s soundtrack was vastly different, something that Burke found interesting.

THE STORY OF EARTHWORM JIM



FIENDISH GOLDFISH, EVIL LAWYERS AND LOTS OF COWS – IT CAN ONLY MEAN AN ADVENTURE STARRING EARTHWORM JIM. KIM WILD FINDS OUT HOW AN ORDINARY WORM TRANSFORMED INTO SOMETHING EXTRAORDINARY



× [Mega Drive] Protecting Peter Puppy is lovely until he unleashes his bad side.

Some stories start from a seed of an idea, a plot device that is then used to create a magical world. Others germinate from the existence of one character, who then goes on to shape the world and everything around it. With *Earthworm Jim*, it was the character that first sprang to life and went on to influence the nature of the game that he would star in.



"It's a long story, but I came up with him in November of 1993 when I was on the outs with Virgin Games," says Doug TenNapel, designer of *Earthworm Jim* and its cast. "I was at home in my little Irvine apartment and Shiny was just starting up. I remember drawing while listening to Fleetwood Mac's *Rumours* and I created Jim and a number of the villains in about 45 minutes! He came out pretty much [as] he is today, a goofy looking worm in a muscular super suit. I did a profile walk cycle of him because I was trying to get the job of animator. I didn't expect we would do a Jim game at that point. It was more a demonstration that I could animate and create for them in a pinch.



> "When Dan Castanella turned up to do Jim's voice over there was a revered hush across the room" KIRK EWING

Jim would still evolve and change as the team developed the game, but the main character was all there."

At the time, Playmates Interactive Entertainment, specialists within the field of toy figures and cartoons, had seen the success of *Sonic The Hedgehog* and decided to become involved with a new videogame franchise which would then lead on to produce its own line of toys and cartoons. Playmates teamed up with Shiny Entertainment – which had already proven its skill with *Global Gladiators*, *Cool Spot* and *Aladdin* – and commissioned it with the task. The arrival of Doug gave Shiny Entertainment the opportunity it was looking for.

"This was early on in Shiny's life, they were pricing photocopiers and building out office space and an animation position opened up when one of the original team didn't work out," continues Doug. "I remember that they were trying to get *Day Of The Tentacle*'s Larry Ahern to sign on and he didn't have much interest. A number of other lucky moments came up that kept that door open to me. I was good friends with Mike Dietz and Ed Schofield, the other two main animators at Shiny. They wanted me but weren't going to just throw me the job. In the end, the final taste test was going to be with Dave Perry. He was also at my original job interview at Virgin Games just four months earlier so he'd seen my hit-and-miss portfolio. I think EWJ, in combination with Mike Dietz's recommendation, pushed me over the edge." With Earthworm Jim came an assorted cast of villains. "When I initially made EWJ in that 45 minute period, I know that Psy-Crow, Major Mucus, Peter Puppy and Professor Tick-For-A-Head (later known as Professor Monkey-For-A-Head) were done in that session."

With a hero and villains drawn, it was time to create a game around them and a story. Earthworm Jim was an ordinary worm until he encountered a space suit that fell from the sky, bestowing him with superhero abilities. However, the evil Psy-Crow and his cohorts were intent on retrieving the suit at all costs so it was down to Jim to protect his new found abilities while also saving Princess-What's-Her-Name from their hands, an enigmatic nameless character whom Jim was madly in love with. When asked why the lead was a worm, Doug explains he's a fan of the underdog. "I was looking for a way to make a weak character have the opportunity to be strong. That's Elliot from *ET* or Marty McFly from *Back To The Future*. These are underlings who are given an opportunity to be bigger. I was specifically studying Warner Bros characters because their personalities were so identifiable and comedic."

What makes *Earthworm Jim* stand out is the quality of the animation, reminiscent of early Chuck Jones and Tex Avery cartoons. Much like their inspirations, each sprite was painstakingly hand ►

drawn and then re-drawn as artwork on cells before scanning them into the computer. The same approach was used for the beautiful backgrounds that feature throughout all the levels, with many having slopes and twists to give the feel of a 3D environment. The emphasis on hand-drawn animation meant that artists were needed to conjure up the world.

"I remember the days when I used to do all the art on graph paper, one pixel at a time," says Dave Perry, programmer and designer of *Earthworm Jim* and its sequel. "That was actually a great time, as it allowed really rubbish artists (like myself) to survive! Once things really started animating my cover was blown, and over the following years non-artists (like me) had to put down their pencils and concede. We brought in the big guns (Nick Bruty was my partner for years), and at Virgin we had their core animation team lead by Mike Dietz and he at one point even used Disney Feature Animators for our *Aladdin* game! Definitely not a fair fight for an average animator. For gamers, all that mattered was they wanted to see amazing graphics, fluid motion and be entertained. I think top level artists/animators became a requirement and we never went back. I loved that time as I learned so much about animation from our guys."

Although Dave Perry and his team were responsible for programming and designing, Doug was allowed to contribute to the overall style of the game, a rare opportunity for the animator. "I was given the role of saying what the character would or wouldn't do. It wasn't official or anything, but I generally got to decide who he was, while the team described what this being was going to do. I

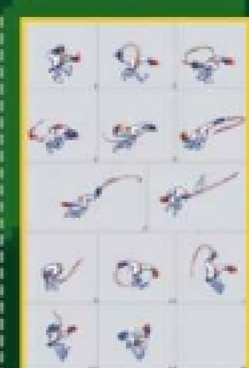


» [Xbox 360] *Earthworm Jim HD* added a selection of mini-games to the original adventure.

> "Jim arrived in the sweet spot of the Sega generation and it won lots of 'Game of the Year' awards" DAVE PERRY

remember Nick Bruty was creating this hellish looking level, and that triggered an opportunity for me to make Evil the Cat the main bad guy. There was a lot of experimentation and give and take. I don't remember dictating anything or having anything dictated to me. We were all chasing the same goal of making a great game and trying to cram it all into this impossibly small cartridge!"

The different vehicles that Earthworm Jim encountered throughout his adventures, from rockets to the bathysphere, came about as the game developed. "They'd say, 'we need him to ride a rocket' and I drew an airplane engine. It had to be small so the sprite didn't take up much room, so Jim's main vehicle wasn't something I came up with from the start, but now we can't imagine Jim without it, " continues Doug.



» Each sprite was drawn and coloured onto cells in a process called Animotion.

Earthworm Jim was released in 1994 on the Sega Mega Drive with a version to follow on the Super Nintendo in 1995. The SNES release has the better visual style of the two, with extra background scrolling for the levels and animations for the characters, but is missing the 'Intestinal Distress' level of the Mega Drive game due to the latter having better compression abilities to store more levels. A Sega CD and Windows 95 'Special Edition' were also released, adding a new level, 'Big Bruty', improving the animation with additional frames and a completely remixed soundtrack along with bonus extras.

A series of handheld ports came about as well, but were developed by a different company. Eurocom released a Game Boy version that left out many of the levels of the original and struggled with poor controls. It was also responsible for a Game Gear release which was a re-coloured version of the Game Boy game but with choppier gameplay and with Jim almost impossible to control. The Game Boy Advance received a port but, although it looked the part, Earthworm Jim was slow and unresponsive to control, making it hard to travel across the large levels.

With *Earthworm Jim* proving to be a hit with gamers and critics alike, a sequel followed and, although not as memorable as the original, was still a zany, enjoyable adventure. Earthworm Jim was this time accompanied by Snot, his green slimy friend, who could be used as a parachute and help him swing from surface to surface. Although still a run-and-gun platformer it contained plenty of variety, from having to rescue Peter's nephews from being tossed out of a window to playing a blind salamander culminating in a quiz at the end of the level.

The sequel also received ports for PlayStation, Saturn and PC in 1996. The former releases added 3D introduction and ending sequences but didn't try and improve on the originals, while the PC



» [SNES] Clever visual techniques meant that slopes gave the game a 3D perspective despite still being in 2D.





» Concept art of the prototype of the rumoured Xbox and PS2 *Earthworm Jim* game



» [Mega Drive] *EWJ 2*'s opening world boasts entirely different coloured level design than the SNES version.

game featured upgraded graphics and audio but was missing the 'Lorenzo's Soil' level. While North America and Europe saw the Saturn release, only Europe received the PlayStation conversion. Once again the game would receive a Game Boy Advance port much later in 2002, but suffered from the same problems of the original with poor controls and slow character movement.

Dave Perry felt that *Earthworm Jim*'s growing appeal was also a question of timing. "*Jim* arrived in the sweet spot of the Sega generation and it won lots of 'Game Of The Year' awards. It was at the right place at the right time. I feel we were very lucky [that] we started when we did. My personal opinion is that the character had an interesting trait of being both weak (a worm) and strong (a suit). By combining the two it opens the door to do crazy/funny things to him."



» [SNES] Playing as a blind salamander is definitely one of those weird moments.

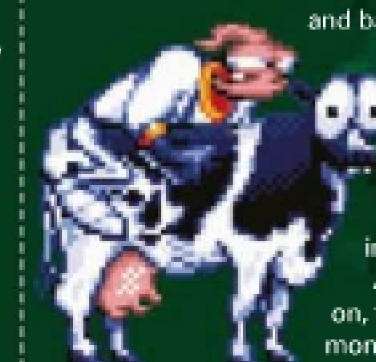
Inevitably the late Nineties ushered in an era of 3D platformers, so it was only a matter of time before *Earthworm Jim* would make the leap into a new dimension. Shiny Entertainment had been purchased by Interplay in 1996 and the idea for a 3D game came about. Although Shiny Entertainment had started work on *MDK* and new development team VIS Interactive took on our spineless hero, Dave Perry and the team were initially consulted on the character's new direction. "After they commissioned us to produce the game, I was one of the team sent to Shiny Entertainment to work with Dave Perry and the creatives to come up with the concept for the next version," recalls Kirk Ewing, director for *Earthworm Jim 3D*.

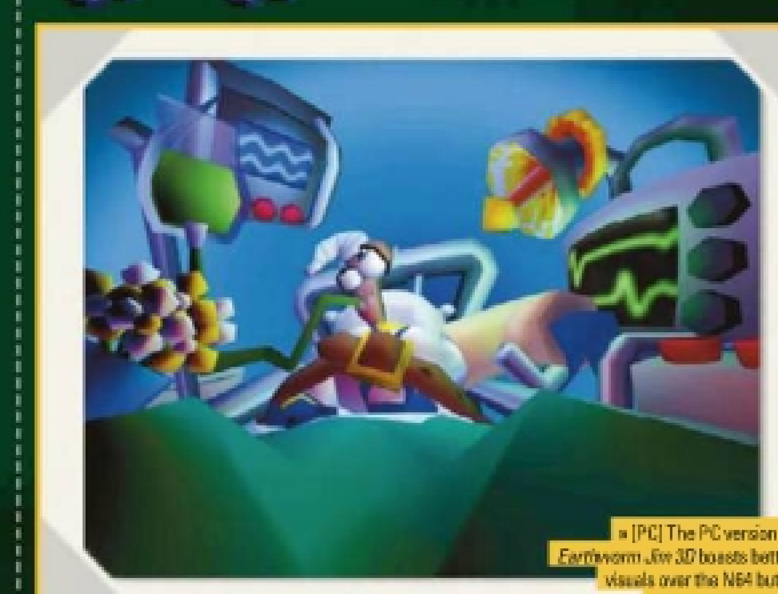
Yet the jump from 2D to 3D proved to be far trickier than anticipated, and the introduction of a new development team proved to be a sore point. "It was a nightmare, our pencil artists had no experience on 3D packages and Interplay let another team make the 3D game, which our guys were just hating," remembers David. "We were stuck in no-man's land; the industry was going 3D, but all our expertise was 2D, meaning *really* 2D, with pencils and colouring in hand-drawn cells. The core animators never made the transition to 3D, instead they switched to Clay and continue to work on clay (stop-motion) today."

It was also difficult to decide just how *Earthworm Jim* was going to look in 3D, and this proved to be one of the many reasons why the game was in development limbo for three years. "Projects like this are really difficult to manage and there's an awful lot of people with an opinion to add to the mix; the publisher, the IP owner, the fans and, of course, us – the developers," continues Kirk. "I remember, for instance, that the finished 3D model of Jim went through at least eight iterations before we found something that everyone agreed on. There were also a lot of heritage elements that just didn't translate as well into 3D (the head whip for instance). A lot of time was spent working with these things to try and make them satisfying, not always with a satisfactory outcome. *Earthworm Jim 3D* was my first experience of working on an original sequel to an existing mega-property and from 2D into 3D as well. It wasn't easy for anybody."

As a result of its prolonged development process, there were plenty of ideas that never made the final cut. "I still have drawers full of sketches for levels and bad guys for that game," laments Kirk. "My biggest regret is that we didn't get more of the original cast in there in cooler ways. I'm not doing it again. We got to make *Earthworm Kim* though, just like we said we would in the first meeting."

Although a difficult game to work on, there were still some memorable moments. "My absolute favourite thing



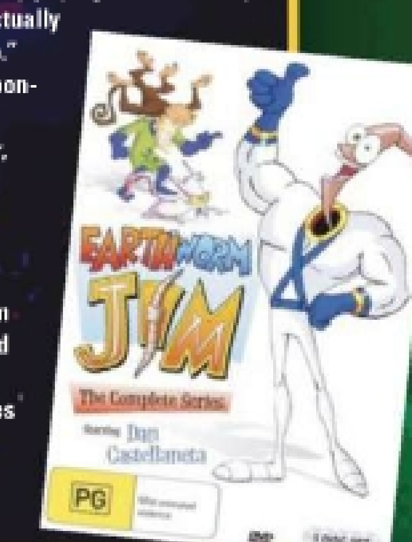


» [PC] The PC version of *Earthworm Jim 3D* boasts better visuals over the N64 but is otherwise identical.



LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION!

If you were a popular videogame character in the Nineties then it was only a matter of time before you ended up with your own TV series. Like Mario and Sonic before him, Earthworm Jim ended up on the silver screen in 1995. Out of respect for the franchise, Universal involved Earthworm Jim's creator throughout the whole process. "I had limited approvals of the script and I designed many of the extras and new characters that showed up in each episode," explains Doug about his involvement. "Universal invited me to participate in every aspect of that show, which is pretty rare. They even started voluntarily paying me when they weren't contractually obliged to do so." Due to the cartoon-inspired nature of the character, Earthworm Jim and his fellow comrades translated well onto the medium of television and endured many crazy adventures in 26 episodes, spread across two seasons.





3D WOES

Other popular characters that struggled with the move to 3D



SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

Although the *Sonic Adventure* and *Sonic Heroes* series were decent platform titles, they were plagued with unforgiving camera angles. Sonic's later escapades in *Sonic The Hedgehog* on Xbox 360 were less than impressive and *Sonic Unleashed* was passable when not forcing you to play in 3D, proving that some characters need to stay in the second dimension.



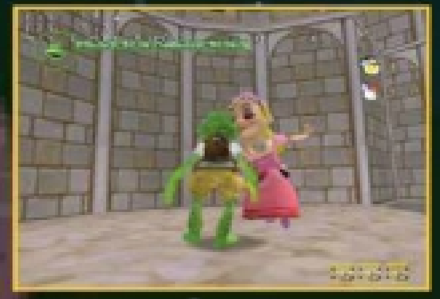
SHADOW THE HEDGEHOG

The darker nemesis of Sonic the Hedgehog may have fared well in the *Adventure* series, but when the time came for him to star in his own game things didn't quite go to plan. An ill-advised decision to equip the character with guns and the ability to decide whether to be good or evil led to a fragmented experience marred with clumsy controls.



MICKEY MOUSE

Once the glittering star of the *Illusion* series and the enjoyable *Mickey's Wild Adventure*, the intrepid mouse entered the 3D world with *Epic Mickey*. The first game was full of nice ideas but struggled with a tricky camera, while the recent sequel failed to build on the original's concept. Hopefully the *Castle Of Illusion* remake will be a return to form for Mickey.



FROGGER

As a game that was never conceived as a platformer, the decision to make *Frogger* into a 3D adventure was an extremely strange use of the franchise and didn't fare well at all. *Frogger's Great Quest* (it really wasn't) and *Ancient Shadow* were poor showings for the amphibian, and even 3D remakes of the original 2D idea lose something in translation.



MALICE

One of those titles that was in development hell for years – eventually switching from one generation to another – Malice's debut struggled with poor level design, very forgettable worlds and, once again, a dynamic camera that was very difficult to control. It wasn't a bad game, but did little to add to an otherwise overcrowded genre.



PITFALL HARRY

Pitfall Harry entered the difficult third dimension in the *Lost Expedition* and the *Big Adventure*, which were passable if not all that memorable platform-style games. To his credit, both games featured rope swinging and plenty of trap dodging which were a couple of the trademarks of the series from its stellar 8-bit era during the Eighties.



BUBSY

While he was never going to threaten Sonic's crown, Bubsy's first outing on the Sega Mega Drive was a solid little time-waster with its own identity. Competing with the release of *Super Mario 64* was never going to be easy, but the release of *Bubsy 3D* showcased a world of poor controls, terrible camera work and ropey visuals. Sorry Bubs.



TOEJAM AND EARL

The funky alien duo crashed onto the Sega Mega Drive in several groovy adventures and eventually made the leap to 3D on the Xbox. Despite a valiant attempt to build on the original games' enjoyable concepts, *Toejam And Earl III: Mission To Earth* received a mixed reception from critics and fans and attained poor sales worldwide upon release.



KAO THE KANGEROO

As heroes go, a boxing kangeroo is certainly a little different to the normal platform character, but unfortunately he still struggles to stand out from the crowd. While his first game sold admirably, despite being fairly average, the sequel didn't fare as well and failed to endear him to platform videogame fans.



PAC-MAN

Not content with eating pills and being chased by ghosts, Pac-Man decided to give the 3D platform gig a try and with mixed results. The *Pac-Man World* series had some nice ideas but struggled with camera issues. Ironically, the hidden 3D mazes are the highlight over the main adventure, proving that sometimes the original ideas are best.



CRASH BANDICOOT

The resident Bandicoot may have captured hearts with the PlayStation games, but future releases in the form of *Twinsanity*, *Crash Of The Titans* and *Mind Over Mutant* as fully-fledged 3D games had mixed results. As videogame icons go, he is still a family favourite and will no doubt reappear some day.



CARRIE FERNANDEZ AND REINHARDT SCHNEIDER

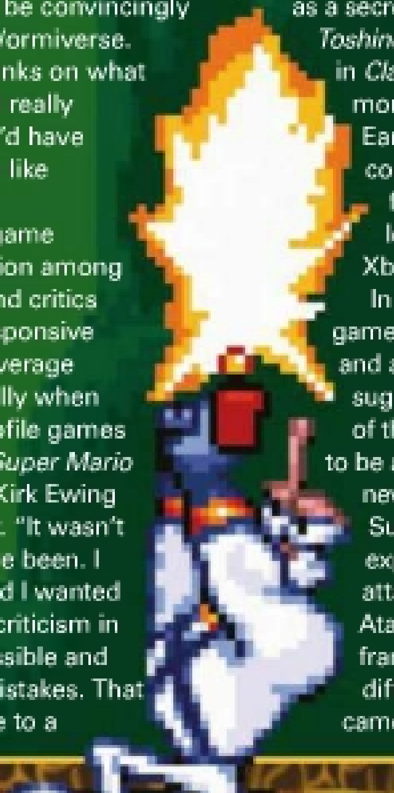
Stars of *Castlevania 64*, Carrie and Reinhardt carry on the vampire killing tradition passed down by the Belmonts. After *Super Castlevania IV*, this game on N64 struggled with combat and camera problems and was a disappointment to critics and fans. The recent *Castlevania* on Xbox 360 and PS3 fared much better.

▶ was working with the voice talent," explains Kirk. "When Dan Castanella turned up to do Jim's voiceover there was a revered hush across the room. Not for long though, he's nuts!"

As examples of 3D games go, there were certainly worse ones on the market and, while the game had its problems with difficult controls, an unresponsive camera and fairly ordinary level design, it did a decent job at retaining the off-the-wall humour the series was renowned for. When it comes down to why Earthworm Jim floundered in 3D, Kirk admits that it was never meant for the character. "Earthworm Jim was designed as a 2D character from the outset – everything about it; the backdrops, the animations, the supporting characters, all existed in an insane 2D world and some elements just could not be convincingly translated into the 3D Wormiverse. This meant a lot of rethinks on what was going to work. If I'd really had my way back then I'd have made it look/work more like *Abe's Oddysee*."

Understandably, the game received a mixed reception among gamers. The fan-base and critics struggled with the unresponsive camera and felt it was average and uninspiring, especially when competing with high profile games such as *Rayman 2* and *Super Mario 64*. Despite everything, Kirk Ewing felt the criticism was fair. "It wasn't as good as it should have been. I loved the first games and I wanted it to be better. You take criticism in context of what was possible and try to learn from your mistakes. That said, I've given the game to a lot of younger kids since then and they've really liked it. Little kids are stupid like that."

Yet 3D wasn't the only problem that Earthworm Jim had to contend with. He was also the star of a side-scrolling platformer for the Game Boy Color called *Earthworm Jim 2: Menace 2 The Galaxy* in 1999. Once again the game lacked the inventiveness of its predecessors and focused more on collecting coins than platforming. Awkward controls and poor level design meant it was an experience better left on the shelves.



After Earthworm Jim's ill-fated dalliance with the third dimension, it was time for our hero to hang up his space suit and burrow underground, resurfacing occasionally to cameo as a secret character for *Battle Arena Toshinden* (PC) and a playable fighter in *Clayfighter 63 1/3*. There were moments when it looked like Earthworm Jim would make a comeback – in 2003 concept art for a prototype game were leaked for a PlayStation 2 and Xbox release.

In 2006, a PSP version of the game went into development, and although early screenshots suggested that it was a remake of the original, it was promised to be a new adventure featuring new environments, Super Suit Overdrive power and an expanded range of moves and attacks. Unfortunately, publisher Atari, owners to the rights of the franchise at the time, hit economic difficulties and development came to a halt.



» [PC] *Earthworm Jim 3D* was in development for three years and didn't live up to the originals.



» [PSP] The cancelled PSP *Earthworm Jim* looked semi-decent, promising challenges and multiplayer modes.

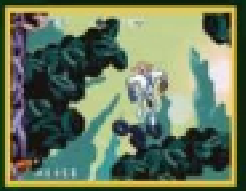
> "I remember drawing while listening to Fleetwood Mac and I created Jim and a number of villains in 45 minutes!" DOUG TENNAPEL



» [Game Gear] Ported across from the Game Boy, *Earthworm Jim* struggled to perform well on the console.



» [Game Boy] The lack of buttons means that handheld versions of *Earthworm Jim* are difficult to play.



» [GBA] While still, *Earthworm Jim* looks the part but struggles to live up to the big console versions.

With the exception of Gameloft's recent HD remake on Xbox Live Arcade and PSN, the prospect of another Earthworm Jim appearance is slim and a fourth game even more unlikely. "We have talked about it many times but the team members all have successful careers doing their own things now," remarks Dave Perry. "It's not impossible, but it's not likely for the time being."

The legacy of Earthworm Jim may be over, but his adventures still live on fondly in the minds of gamers and in the hearts of those who brought him to life. "In the end, I make art for other people and *Earthworm Jim* moved a lot of people to love a creation that I don't entirely feel worthy of," comments Doug. "In the end, it's not about me. What I make has a life of its own and what it becomes is not a reflection of my own power or ability. I'm just happy that something I was involved in put a smile on so many faces. It's entirely possible that nothing else I make will have the same effect on so many people. In some ways, I never thought so many people shared my tastes in what I thought was funny or interesting. We're all living at the right place and at the right time for me to not only make Jim but for so many people to enjoy it."



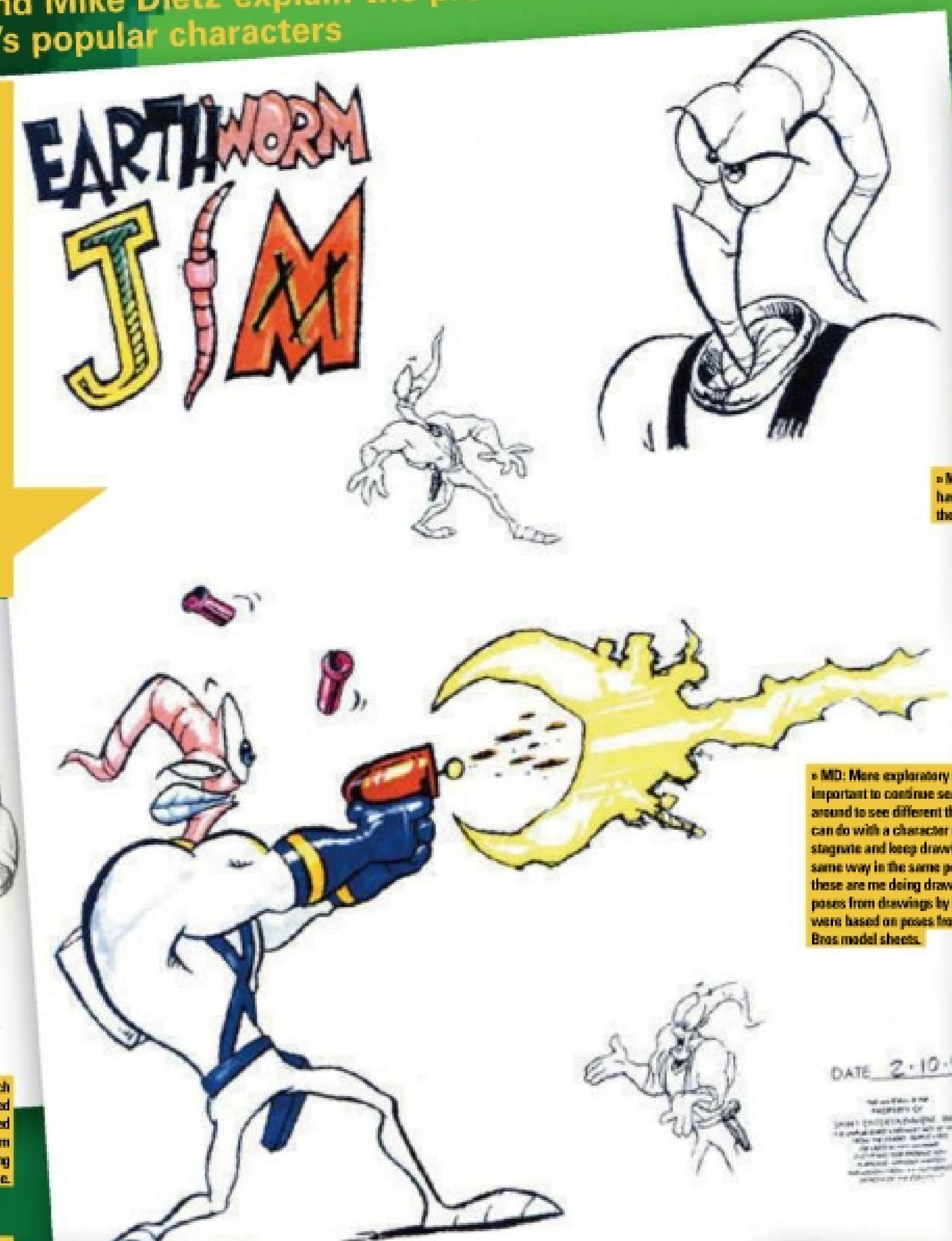
Many thanks to Katherine Garner of Rocketworm (www.rocketworm.com) for providing concept art and sprites for this feature. Thanks to Dave Perry, Doug TenNapel, Kirk Ewing and Mike Dietz for their time.

THE ART OF EARTHWORM JIM



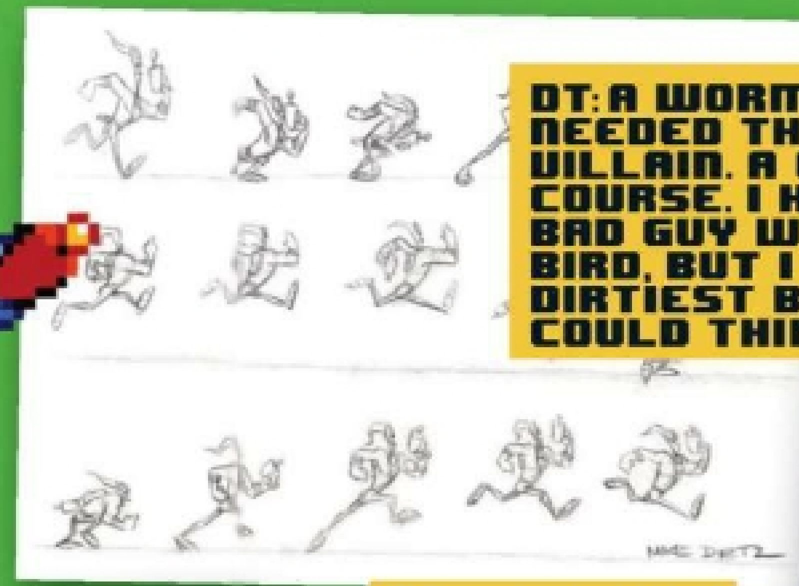
Doug TenNapel and Mike Dietz explain the process behind their art and the game's popular characters

DT: I ORIGINALLY TOOK JIM'S FORM AND TRACED HIM OVER EVERY WARNER BROS MODEL SHEET I COULD FIND TO SEE HOW HE WOULD MOVE. SO I'D FIND THIS EXTREME DRAWING OF DAFFY DUCK, THEN I'D HANG EWJ OVER THAT POSE





» MD: Another random sketch, having fun and exploring the character.



DT: A WORM HERO NEEDED THE PERFECT VILLAIN. A CROW, OF COURSE. I KNEW THE BAD GUY WOULD BE A BIRD, BUT I PICKED THE DIRTIEST BLACK BIRD I COULD THINK OF.

» MD: This is one of a set of rough sketches I did when I was exploring images for a print ad. I ended up doing a finished illustration of this pose for a magazine cover. Afterward Mike Koelsch did another painting based on this pose (his illustration was way better than mine!), and then a digital version of this pose ended up in the game – so we got a lot of mileage out of this one. Ironically, it's one of my least favorite drawings I ever did of Jim – I always preferred the funny Jim over the 'tough guy' character.





» MD: A sketchbook drawing of Psycrow. I never really got a good feel for him. Doug and Ed's drawings of Psycrow had more life than mine ever did. The other drawings are of two of the team members, super talented designer Tom Tanaka and uber artist Mark Lorenzen.

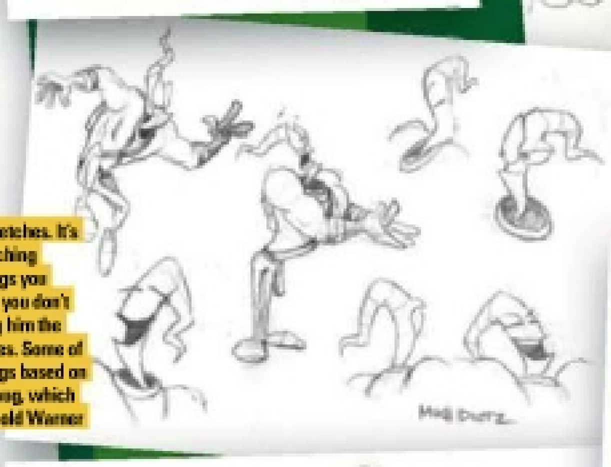




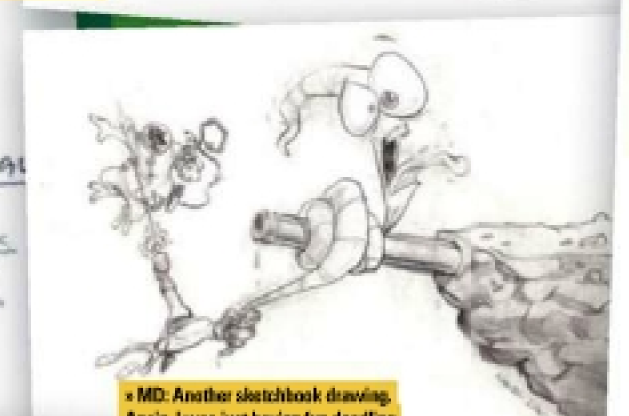
DT: IF YOU THINK OF THE CONTRAST I WAS CREATING IN JIM BEING POWERFUL BUT WEAK, PETER PUPPY REFLECTED THAT IN HIS GOOD NATURED INNOCENCE THAT TURNED INTO A HORRIBLE SPACE MONSTER AT ANY SECOND.



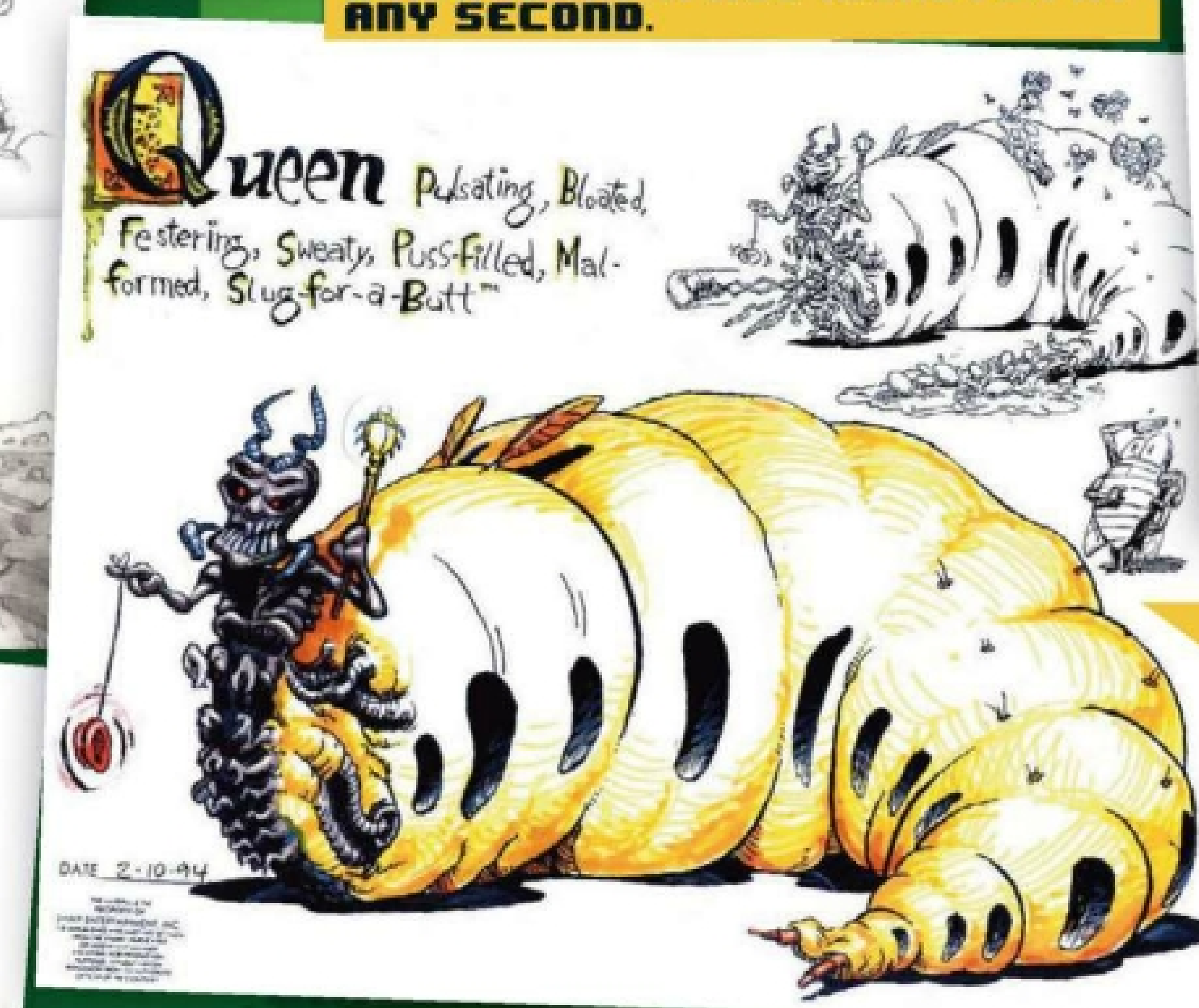
» MD: This was a concept sketch I did for a pose to be animated for an *EWJ* TV commercial. I ended up animating a pencil test of Jim grabbing his head and whipping the camera based on this pose.



» MD: More exploratory sketches. It's important to continue searching around to see different things you can do with a character so you don't stagnate and keep drawing him the same way in the same poses. Some of these are me doing drawings based on poses from drawings by Doug, which were based on poses from old Warner Bros model sheets.



» MD: Another sketchbook drawing. Again, I was just having fun doodling Jim. He's a great character to draw.



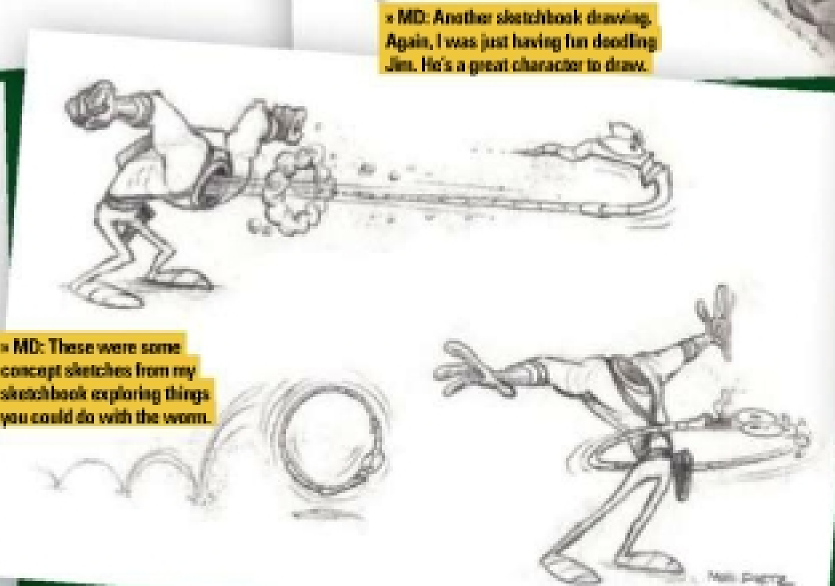
DT: IN ADDITION TO BEING AN AMPHIBIAN FAN, I ALSO LOVE THE ANATOMY OF INSECTS. I STARTED HER CREATION WITH THE BLOATED ABDOMEN OF A TERMITE QUEEN. THAT WAS THE GROSSEST THING I COULD THINK OF IN THE ANIMAL KINGDOM.



» MD: More Jim doodles. Just having fun, probably during a boring meeting.



» MD: More drawings from my sketchbook. They didn't serve any specific purpose, I just enjoyed drawing Jim and did so whenever I got the chance.



» MD: These were some concept sketches from my sketchbook exploring things you could do with the worm.

IMPORT ONLY



INFO

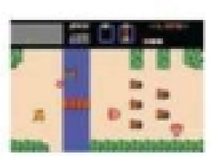


- » **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- » **DEVELOPER:** NINTENDO
- » **SYSTEM:** GAME BOY
- » **ALSO ON:** N/A
- » **GENRE:** BEAT-'EM-UP
- » **RELEASED:** 1992
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £30-£40 (£10-£15 CART ONLY)

EVOLUTION OF THE GENRE

▲ **Retro**

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA
RELEASED: **1987**



Link's debut was a staggering feat back in the day, a sprawling fantasy adventure the likes of which simply shouldn't have been possible on 8-bit hardware. It was here that many of the standards and features of both series and genre were first established.

▼ **Modern**



THE BINDING OF ISAAC
RELEASED: **2011**
This disturbing top-down adventure from *Super Meat Boy* creator Edmund McMillen has a distinct *Zelda* vibe about it, although it also mixes in random generation and roguelike elements to ensure that no two playthroughs are ever the same. An updated version of the game is due for release next year.

KAERU NO TAME NI KANE WA NARU

» IT LOOKS LIKE A ZELDA GAME, SOUNDS LIKE A ZELDA GAME AND WITHOUT IT, THERE MIGHT NOT EVEN HAVE BEEN A ZELDA GAME ON GAME BOY. LUKE ALBIGÉS REVISITS THE JAPAN-ONLY ADVENTURE THAT PAVED THE WAY FOR LINK'S AWAKENING

Did you ever play a *Zelda* game and think to yourself 'yeah, it was okay, but it could have done with a few more frogs'? Of course you didn't. Nobody did. Still, just as in any good episode of *Dragon's Den*, we're here with a solution to a problem that doesn't exist. Only in this case, said solution involves you getting to play a great game you've most likely never even heard of before. Despite its low profile in the West (on account of not being released here), *Kaeru No Tame Ni Kane Wa Naru* – or *For The Frog The Bell Tolls*, to give the game its translated title – has pedigree behind it as well as influence beyond. And while it's perhaps not exactly a classic in its own right, this amphibian adventure has a place in the history books as the game that laid the foundations for Link to go handheld.

You see, the engine at the heart of *For The Frog The Bell Tolls* is an early version of the one that would later be used for *Link's Awakening*, the first portable *Zelda* game and one of the best games in the franchise. But as much as its design would inform the later *Zelda* game, it is also informed by previous ones. While *A Link To The Past* would return to the template of the original, *For The Frog The Bell Tolls* instead takes its cues from *Zelda II*. The top-down viewpoint works wonders for world map navigation, but dungeon exploration takes the form of several side-scrolling sections – a format that the Game Boy *Zelda* debut would also use.



» [Game Boy] *Chrono Trigger, Star Fox, Ribbit King*… could it be that the secret of great game design is just to give a frog a starring role?

One key difference, though, is that *For The Frog The Bell Tolls* doesn't really have a combat system per se. You approach an enemy and the entire battle takes place in a dust cloud, outside of your control. Life is slowly sapped from both player and enemy based on attack and defence ratings until only one is left standing – regular enemies go down pretty easy but in the case of boss fights, you need to have the best gear available and a full life bar in order to come out on top. It's a simple system but one that controls progress brilliantly, even if the lack of interaction may not be ideal. The same mechanic would later be used in DS oddity *Freshly-Picked: Tingle's Rosy Rupeeland* – a rare example of a spin-off borrowing from the inspiration rather than the source material.

Going into *For The Frog The Bell Tolls* after several years of playing *Zelda*, you'd find it hard to miss the various similarities. Mechanically, it's extremely similar, from the basic structure to the equipment menu. Music, while courtesy of a different composer, is also pretty close and the rest of the audio, including those little fanfares when you pick up something valuable, is on the same page too. Animation is so close that some of the same routines are actually reused in *Link's Awakening* – Link's death spin is common in *For The Frog The Bell Tolls*, while there are countless other deja vu moments waiting for anyone who has served their time with the Wind Fish.

GO DEEPER

Dissecting the frog…



WHAT LANGUAGE BARRIER?
» Can't read Japanese? Not a problem. An excellent fan translation surfaced a few years back, though it's also quite playable without.

PRINCE CHARMING
» This is your hero, the prince of Sable. His friend and rival, Prince Richard, actually makes an appearance in *Link's Awakening*.

RIBBIT KING
» Just one of many frogs you'll encounter on your travels. You can even change into one yourself later in the game.

STAYIN' ALIVE
» As in *Zelda* games, extra hearts can be added to your life bar. With the odd combat system, you'll need this maxed out to beat bosses.

MR MONEYBAGS
» As a prince, you start the game stinking rich. Don't assume this makes things easy, though – you go from riches to rags straight away.

> “The engine at the heart of For The Frog The Bell Tolls is an early version of the one that would later be used for Link's Awakening”

CAN'T IMPORT? YOU COULD TRY



THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: LINK'S AWAKENING

» While many may dismiss Link's diminuitive handheld outing for not having many of the usual staples, we'd argue that, even without the Hyrule setting and titular princess, it's still one of the best games in the series. Gameplay was adapted brilliantly to accomodate the small screen, and puzzle and dungeon design still stands out as exceptional even today. The Game Boy Color re-release proved to be even better, with new areas and puzzles that took full advantage of the shift from monochrome to full colour.



» [Game Boy] Like *Zelda II*, dungeons take the form of side-scrolling sections. You can jump and climb freely, though the rest of the mechanics go unchanged.



» [Game Boy] Losing a fight sends you to the hospital. There's no penalty for death beyond having to refill missing hearts, so explore away!

Too many great Japan-only games will never be enjoyed by many Western players due to the language barrier, so it's with mad respect for the people responsible that we get to say that there's a brilliant fan translation out there for *Kaeru No Tame Ni Kane Wa Naru*. It's perfectly playable without, as long as you don't mind missing out on some of the nuance and most of the characters being named after puddings. But this is an important slice of gaming history – if the dedication of a fan translating and re-coding the entire script can help educate and entertain more people, we can't see how that could ever be construed as a negative.

Any *Zelda* fan owes it to themselves to check out *For The Frog The Bell Tolls*. It's a simpler game than most of Link's outings but looks, feels and plays like a proof of concept for one of the best games in the series. Hands-off battles stand out for being entertaining if not involving, a method that games like *Assassin's Creed* still employ to this day. Side-scrolling sections are ace, though you'd expect no less with *Metroid* veteran Makoto Kanoh on board. And neat gameplay gimmicks like allowing the player to transform into various animals (no, not just frogs) elevate this to something more impressive, something more important than it might otherwise be. As the missing link in the *Zelda* timeline, fans would do well to befriend a few frogs and fill in the gaps in their knowledge in the process.

MYTH

HISTORY IN THE MAKING

SYSTEM 3'S TALE OF MAGICAL INTRIGUE AND MYSTERY TAKES PLACE OVER – LITERALLY –THOUSANDS OF YEARS. GRAEME MASON EXPLORES THE CREATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THIS CLASSIC ACTION-ADVENTURE

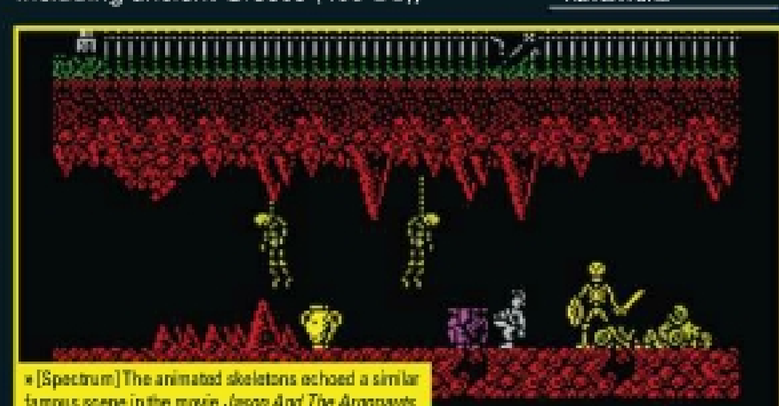
BY 1988, SYSTEM 3 SOFTWARE HAD BEEN ESTABLISHED FOR SIX YEARS AND WAS ALREADY WELL-KNOWN FOR GAMES SUCH AS THE BEAT-'EM-UP INTERNATIONAL KARATE AND THE EXCELLENT SERIES OF LAST NINJA GAMES ON COMMODORE 64. Eager to step up production, owner Mark Cale had already begun overseeing the development of many more projects, mostly in line with his ethos of producing original gaming experiences rather than games based on licensed properties – a trend that was becoming increasingly common.

One such project was *Myth: History In The Making*, and Mark himself explains to us the initial idea. "I wanted to construct a game using stories that people could identify with, something well-known; so we began researching myths such as the Hydra, Medusa and the Norse legends with the idea of putting them into a game." The basic format for *Myth* would ultimately work as follows: after an initial level set in Hades, the player, a contemporary hero summoned through time to do battle with an evil demon, is transported to several different eras including ancient Greece (400 BC), Scandinavia (900 AD) and Egypt (3000 BC). In order to proceed to the present day and a final showdown with the main villain, Daemeron, the levels had to be traversed, puzzles had to be solved and each end of level guardian (a famous mythical creature perverted to evil by Daemeron) had to be defeated.



IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** SYSTEM 3
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- » **RELEASED:** 1989 (8-BIT), 1991 (16-BIT)
- » **PLATFORM:** VARIOUS
- » **GENRE:** ACTION/ ADVENTURE



» [Spectrum] The animated skeletons echoed a similar famous scene in the movie *Jason And The Argonauts*.

Work began on *Myth* in 1988, with development taking just over a year in total for the 8-bit computers. The programmer and graphic artist team of Pete Baron and Bob Stevenson worked on the original Commodore 64 version. "Bob and I had just finished a conversion of Konami's *Salamander*," begins Pete, "and it went down pretty well. So my agent, Jacqui Lyons, hooked us up with System 3 and Mark Cale for its next project." Pete was handed a document detailing how System 3 imagined *Myth* that could transpire. "It wasn't great, truth be told, and largely a sprawling collection of mythological research jammed into an ordinary platform game." After plucking up the courage, Pete and Bob approached Mark Cale with their reservations; fortunately, the System 3 chief agreed and listened keenly to the new design offered by them. Pete explains: "We thought they'd gone too in-depth. Our impression was that if the myths were not pretty much common knowledge then they would be too obscure for a lot of players. So we went out and bought a few children's books, with one title from Penguin I remember being particularly useful for source material. Anything aimed at pre-teens we saw as being full of perfect stuff to put into the game." The design produced by the programming team was based around key puzzles that required either the aforementioned ubiquitous mythological knowledge or some old-fashioned exploration and experimentation. Each section was to include one or two puzzles with three sections per load and four loads in total. This, mixed in with swordplay, shooting action and platforming, would make up the gameplay for *Myth*. There was no doubting the team's ambition.



» [Spectrum] Medusa's head should come in handy, but you need a special bag to put it in…

THE OTHER MYTH

■ Earlier in 1989, famous adventure publisher Magnetic Scrolls released *Myth*, a small adventure sold only to members of an Adventurer's Club called Official Secrets. We say sold, it was actually given away free and procured a *Crash* Smash in the process. The game focused on just one legend, that of the Greek Gods – specifically Poseidon – whom the player took control of. Thanks to its limited release, the Magnetic Scrolls game remains relatively obscure and is one of the more famed 'MIA' games on website World Of Spectrum. "We were never aware of any other game called *Myth*," admits Mark Cale, "and ours was always called *Myth* with the strapline *History In The Making* because we felt the phrase was perfect considering the design of our game."



» System 3's Mark Cale.

> **"I WANTED TO CONSTRUCT A GAME USING STORIES THAT PEOPLE COULD IDENTIFY WITH"**
>
> Mark Cale on the origins of *Myth*

Over on the ZX Spectrum and Amstrad, coding duties were handled by Creative Reality's Neil Dodwell, with colleague Dave Dew working on the graphics. "Together with Jas Austin we were working for Martech writing games such as *Nemesis The Warlock*, *Tarzan* and *Rex*," says Neil, "but we felt we weren't really earning enough and considered it time for a change. Then one day, someone recommended we talk to this agent." The agent in question was none other than Jacqui Lyons, and within a few days of meeting Jacqui, Dave and Neil were also on board the *Myth* project. "System 3 seemed to be a pretty cool company to work for. I remember Mark Cale was driving a Ferrari; I turned up to meetings in my Ford Capri!" laughs Neil. However, even the design document rejigged by Pete Baron and Bob Stevenson failed to excite Dave and Neil. "It was written essentially for the Commodore 64 and didn't seem to be something we could reproduce for the Spectrum. So we simply decided to interpret it as best we could."

Despite the technical limitations of the ZX Spectrum, Creative Reality's experience on the Sinclair machine served them very well when it came to *Myth*. "Jas [Austin] had tried this technique in *Rex*



» [Spectrum] *Myth* has plenty of tricky puzzles that need solving before you can progress.

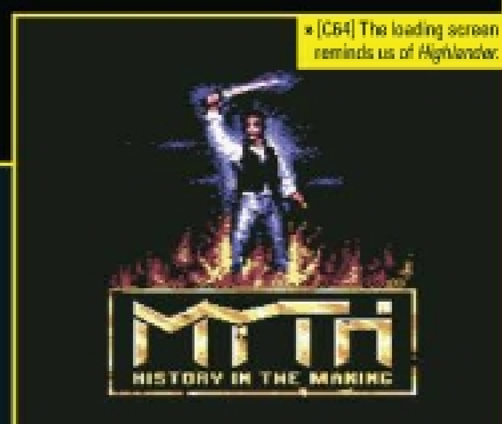


» [Spectrum] This multi-headed Hydra awaited the player at the end of the ancient Greece level.





» [Amiga] Even the high score table had a hellish twinge to it.



» [C64] The loading screen reminds us of *Highlander*.


» [C64] Accosted by demons and skeletons.

[see **Retro Gamer** 112] where we avoided attribute clash by having a colourful scene that the player went behind rather than in front of and we used the same principle in *Myth*." Although the technique had been pioneered in other games such as Virgin's *Dan Dare*, it was a combination of this and the superb animation that really caught the eye in the Spectrum version of *Myth*. "That probably came from me writing a program that allowed Dave to animate as freely as possible and to then compress and sequence the animation into the game," explains Neil. "We'd also written our own sprite animation tools as it always seemed to help having our own software." Despite this, Neil still has reservations about the animation. "Although it had a lot of frames and looked great, playing it now feels like we sacrificed playability for visuals a little. Actually, I'm surprised it all managed to fit into the memory."

C64 coder Pete Baron was also impressed by the job Creative Reality had done on the Spectrum. "They realised very early that our design played to the strengths of the C64, yet what was amazing was that they didn't then reduce it to the lowest common denominator and make a second-rate game; instead they re-designed it very carefully from the ground up and made a classic game in its own right." Perhaps the biggest change was the lack of scrolling on the Spectrum version ("There was no way we could do that on the Speccy, so we used a window that moved along the map but overlapped the previous screen," recalls Neil), and the shift in focus from swordplay to shooting. But there was one big problem common to both games, as Pete Baron tells us: "It was an ambitious game, and Mark was always keen to get product out very quickly." Time was, ironically, the teams' greatest enemy. "Consequently we were up against some pretty harsh deadlines and in the end we went over quite significantly. Fortunately, by then it was gone far enough that everyone could see the game was going to be something special." Nevertheless, the time issue did force the programmers to compromise when it came to the incongruous conclusion to *Myth*.

"The final level wasn't originally designed as a shoot-'em-up," reveals Pete, "as we had some really weird hallucinogenic-type ideas where defeating the Egyptian tomb had given you levitational powers so you could jump and hover for a while over another mainly platform level. I wish we'd had the time for it." Spectrum coder Neil Dodwell agrees. "We had spent so long on the main levels that I think we had only two or three days left to do that bit, so we just kind of threw it together. It all seemed a bit random, and

MORE ON MYTH: HISTORY IN THE MAKING

■ The Spectrum version currently sits at 52 in the top 100 games visitor chart on World Of Spectrum and number 12 in the *Your Sinclair* top 100 games chart from 1993, as voted for by the *YS* readers.

■ Pete Baron himself admits that the decaying health feature on the C64 version was a mistake: "It was a last minute decision made only because we had complaints from testers that the game was too easy. But by that time they knew all the puzzle solutions so were just basing this on the fighting difficulty."

■ When the files for the game returned from Germany (where the copy-protection was incorporated), it was more tightly compressed than System 3 were expecting. Consequently, with a little extra space to play with, Bob and Pete spent a day digitising a welcome message for the C64 version. "And it's one of the things that people always remember most about the game!" smiles Pete.

■ Neil Dodwell also wrote the Amstrad version of *Myth*. "I was mainly active for Creative Reality on the Amstrad so it was natural I should convert *Myth* for System 3 as well. I wrote both versions on the floor in my bedroom at my parent's house as I didn't even have a desk back then!"

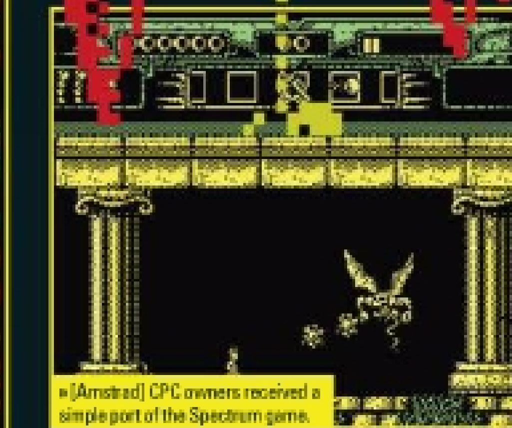
■ The expansive story that accompanied the original 8-bit versions of *Myth* was written by Tim Best, who also devised the story to *The Last Ninja*.

■ The music to the Commodore 64 version was from legendary Dutch composers Maniacs Of Noise – aka Jeroen Tel.

"GREAT ON BRAWN, GREAT ON BRAIN, GREAT ON GRAPHICS – A WINNER!"
Crash magazine effuses over the Spectrum version of *Myth*

I don't think it makes any sense really." System 3 boss Mark Cale has a different, more calculated view on *Myth*'s strange final part. "We felt the shoot-'em-up genre was still popular and that, after all the platforming and puzzling, the player would want a change and that it would be a pleasant surprise." As a result, the shooting level remained intact in all subsequent versions, and, despite its incongruity, made a refreshing change at the end of the game.


» [Amiga] Despite superior sound and graphics, the 16-bit version of *Myth* didn't vary the gameplay to any great degree.


» [Amstrad] CPC owners received a simple port of the Spectrum game.

Myth: History In The Making on the 8-bits was a big hit and scored impressively in the gaming press. *Zzap!* reviewed it in November of 1989 and comments varied from "completely amazing" to "a wonderful mix of arcade action", despite the reviewers still noting a relative obscurity of some of the puzzles. Sister publication, *Crash*, was equally effusive of the Spectrum version, concluding that the game was "Great on brawn, great on brain, great on graphics – a winner!" and scored it an outstanding 96 per cent.

Not content with the C64, Spectrum and Amstrad versions, System 3 touted *Myth* to the American market and eventually found an interested partner in publisher Mindscape. Taking the swashbuckling Commodore 64 version as a base, Mindscape felt the game wasn't strong enough on its own to succeed, leading it to shoehorn *Myth* into its *Conan The Barbarian* license. They released the game on the Nintendo Entertainment System but, at this point in time (1991), felt the system still had not achieved a convincing foothold in Europe, resulting in *Conan* ultimately only seeing the light of day in their own territory. Meanwhile, System 3 pressed on with the Amiga and Atari ST versions that naturally included upgraded graphics and other technical improvements, but suffered in a genre that was starting to look dated as games design began to slowly advance into 3D. Additionally, an obligatory change from the release of *Conan The Barbarian* was the artwork – it was obvious the evocative original cover and advertisement depicting a contemporary young man dressed in jeans, T-shirt and trainers with numerous mythical creatures hovering menacingly above him did not fit into the *Conan* canon. Therefore, a generic barbarian with rippling muscles was created for the NES adverts and box art and, when the game eventually made it onto the 16-bits, System 3 kept the theme. The original 8-bit "mere mortal" storyline was no more.



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

INTERNATIONAL KARATE (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: COMMODORE 64, ZX SPECTRUM, AMSTRAD, ATARI ST
YEAR: 1986

THE LAST NINJA
SYSTEM: COMMODORE 64, COMMODORE AMIGA
YEAR: 1990

PUTTY SQUAD
SYSTEM: SNES
YEAR: 1994


» [Spectrum] What mythical adventure would be complete without a dragon?


» [Spectrum] About to use a scroll to progress.

Pete Baron says excitedly, "It was a little too late in the Commodore 64's life cycle to make me famous at the time, but it helped a lot when Bob and I went to sell our next concept to Devious Designs which paid the bills for the next 18 months! I still get a big buzz every time I see a new fan site or a good reference to the game – I'm hugely proud of it." Neil Dodwell is equally proud of his team's versions of *Myth*: "Especially within the bounds of what the ZX Spectrum was capable of, I think we did a brilliant job. We made a very Spectrum version of what was essentially a C64 game. It was made even more worth it when the reviews came out: getting a *Crash* Smash was the highlight of any game developer's career!" But we leave the final words, and a surprising admission, to System 3 boss Mark Cale. "We always aimed for the best, so weren't surprised when *Myth* got a Sizzler and a *Crash* Smash. I'm proud of all our games, but this one in particular for the diversity between the Spectrum and Commodore 64 versions. I actually think the Spectrum version is best!"

On that bombshell, we think it's time to step back into ancient Greece once more…

Many thanks to Pete Baron, Neil Dodwell and Mark Cale.

A TALE OF TWO TALES

■ With the NES version of *Myth* adapted for a vacant *Conan The Barbarian* license, the original artwork had to be changed. Compare here the box art for the original 8-bit version depicting the "mere mortal" yanked from the 20th Century to the muscle-bound barbarian star of the NES and 16-bit versions.





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Minority Report

Exclusive to Japan, the Famicom Disk System represents uncharted waters for even the most dedicated of retro collectors. The console hosted the debuts of Zelda, Metroid and Kid Icarus, but here Damien McFerran runs down the other gems waiting to be found



OTOCKY

■ DEVELOPER: SCITRON & ART / SEDIC / TOSHI IWAI ■ YEAR: 1987



[Famicom Disk System] Those floating eyes are enemies – take them out.

■ **Music games have become more common as gaming technology has advanced, but there are examples as far back as the 8-bit era – *Otocky* being one notable release. The game's cute boxart and underwhelming graphics belie the groundbreaking concept that lies at its heart. The brainchild of designer Toshi Iwai – who would later create the similarly-themed *Electroplankton* on the Nintendo DS – *Otocky* is a unique fusion of side-scrolling shooter and music creator.**

Placed in control of a cute-looking spaceship, you must use a ball weapon to destroy enemies and collect special items. Eight-way fire allows you to influence the music which plays in the background – each of the eight directions triggers a different musical note – and taking damage causes the ball weapon to shrink in size, making it harder to score hits. Collecting special icons allows you to switch your current instrument, changing the background music and the sounds generated by your attacks. The gameplay is unique in that levels scroll infinitely until you fill your weapon gauge to the required level to tackle the boss. When this happens, you are transported to a different screen where you must take down the aforementioned guardian.

Otocky was one of the first action video games to feature user-generated music; the game even features an unlockable 'free play' mode in which you can compose your own ditties without having to concern yourself with blasting enemies. The visuals are relatively sparse, even for a Famicom game – levels are basic affairs with little environmental detail and enemy sprites are similarly lacking in complexity. This isn't as much an issue as it would be in any other game, because with *Otocky* it's almost tempting to close your eyes during play and soak up the bespoke tunes your button presses are creating.

The Famicom Disk System's lack of exposure outside of its native Japan has relegated *Otocky* to the status of forgotten classic as far as Western Nintendo fans are concerned, but its influence – and that of its creator – can be felt in subsequent titles. Although members of the now defunct Sega studio United Game Artists have insisted that it wasn't an direct inspiration, *Otocky* can be seen as a clear forebear of Tetsuya Mizuguchi's on-rails shooter *Rez*, a 2002 release which would take the core concept of *Space Harrier* and *Panzer Dragoon* and introduce a musical focus. *Otocky*'s esteemed reputation has caused second-hand prices to rise steadily over the years – the disk and plastic case alone can fetch around £30 – but completists will want to grab the fully boxed edition, which shipped with a large instruction manual and was packaged in a fetching cardboard box. On a side note, the game was endorsed by Japanese songstress Natsuki Ozawa, who more recently created quite a stir by becoming an adult video model – something of a career change from lending her name to cute, music-centric Famicom Disk System shooters.

[Famicom Disk System] Taking the stairs.



[Famicom Disk System] Collect the musical notes to boost your gauge.



[Famicom Disk System] Hitting the icons on those pillars releases more pick-ups.





» ABOUT THE SYSTEM

- The disks used by the Famicom Disk System were double-sided and could hold 112 KB of data in total.
- 4.44 million Famicom Disk Systems were sold in Japan – a Western launch never happened, despite being announced.
- The Famicom Disk System was capable of being powered by six C-cell batteries, which would last almost half a year with daily play.



» AI SENSHI NICOL

■ DEVELOPER: KONAMI ■ YEAR: 1987

■ **Loosely translated as** '*Love Warrior Nicol*', this action title shares similarities with the top-down shooting segments taken from *Contra* – another game by Konami. The player is required to track down three diamonds on the game's seven eclectic stages, each of which is held by a different boss character. By collecting items of a futuristic space suit, the player can cross certain obstacles and avoid taking heavy damage. Strikingly attractive for an 8-bit title released in 1987, *Ai Senshi Nicol* has since been released on mobile phones in Japan but remains largely unknown in the West, despite its desirable status as a Konami action game.



» VS EXCITEBIKE

■ DEVELOPER: NINTENDO R&D1 ■ YEAR: 1988

■ **Not to be** confused with the 1984 arcade version – which carried the same title – *Vs Excitebike* is notable for including a two-player mode which allows friendly competition between chums. Players can pick the track they wish to race on, the amount of rounds needed to decide the winner and the number of laps taken. Furthermore, user-generated tracks can be saved to the Famicom Disk System format thanks to the rewritable nature of the console's media. *Vs Excitebike* is arguably one of the best versions of the game, thanks to its two-player mode, and its customisable nature is well-suited to the console.



» KNIGHT MOVE

■ DEVELOPER: JV DIALOG / ALEXEY PAJITNOV ■ YEAR: 1990

■ **Created by Alexey Pajitnov** – better known as the man behind *Tetris* – *Knight Move* is a puzzle title that is based around the L-shape movement of a knight piece in a game of chess. The objective is to remove tile pieces from the board and the challenge lies in avoiding a nasty fall down a hole you've created. Exclusive to the console, *Knight Move* is collectable largely due to the legendary status of its creator. Not to be confused with Microsoft's 1995 Windows-based puzzler *Knight Moves*, which is based on the Famicom Disk System title but had no input from Pajitnov himself.



» KAETTE KITA MARIO BROS

■ DEVELOPER: NINTENDO ■ YEAR: 1988

■ **Released in Japan** as part of a Famicom Disk writer promotion – which allowed owners to write new titles on their existing disks – this enhanced port of *Mario Bros* showcases revised gameplay, tightened controls, additional cut-scenes and the ability to save your score. Interestingly, *Mario Bros Classic* – a Euro-only cartridge release for Nintendo's 8-bit console – is based on this version, rather than the North American NES original, most likely down to the fact that it boasts better controls. Because it was only available via the Disk Writer, this is an incredibly rare title.



» BIO MIRACLE BOKUTTE UPA

■ DEVELOPER: KONAMI ■ YEAR: 1988

■ **An action platformer** with a baby as the lead character, *Bio Miracle Bokutte Upa* launched as a Famicom Disk System exclusive in 1988 but would later find its way to the standard Famicom in 1993. It was slated for release in the West, but Nintendo of America blocked the move. The game's lofty status ensured that it eventually arrived on the Wii Virtual Console in 2008, although it should be noted that this version is based on the cartridge edition, which lacks the additional audio channel present in the Famicom Disk System original. Cute and playable, this is a must-have purchase for the Disk System library.



» MONTY NO DOKI DOKI DAISASSOU

■ DEVELOPER: JALECO ■ YEAR: 1987

■ **Based on Gremlin's** *Monty On The Run*, *Monty No Doki Doki Daisassou* substitutes the main character for a human and transports the action from England to a collection of forgotten temples. Despite the changes – and the obscure nature of the Japanese release – *Monty No Doki Doki Daisassou* remains an intriguing platformer, and serves as an excellent example of how popular Western games can be altered to suit the tastes of Japanese audiences. Needless to say, a game about a mole escaping from the Miner's Strike may have been lost on Famicom owners on the other side of the world.

Famicom Disc System photography for feature and cover courtesy of Evan-Amos

Minority Report



[Famicom Disk System] Imagine *Zelda* crossed with Samurais and you're nearly there.

NAZO NO MURASAME JŌ

■ DEVELOPER: NINTENDO ■ YEAR: 1986

■ **Bearing more than a passing resemblance to *The Legend Of Zelda* – another notable Famicom Disk System release – *Nazo No Murasame Jō* is a samurai-themed adventure with a tight focus on fast action.**

Set during the Edo period of Japan's history, the game fuses reality with science fiction, with the central antagonist being an alien from outer space who controls some of Japan's most powerful feudal lords. Hero Takamaru must infiltrate well-guarded castles to defeat these brainwashed rulers and put an end to the evil xenomorph's reign of terror. With its large maps, fast-moving enemies and surprisingly steep challenge, *Nazo No Murasame Jō* certainly isn't for the faint-hearted. Koji Kondo – the composer behind many *Mario* and *Zelda* titles – provides the musical accompaniment, and the simplistic visuals come in handy when you're on the game's more challenging levels, where being able to clearly spot advancing foes is vitally important. An early release for the system, *Nazo No Murasame Jō* was not as commercially successful as many other system exclusives and consequently never saw release outside of Japan. It remains something of a cult classic and has been referenced in titles such as *Wario Ware DIY*, *Pikmin 2* and, more recently, *Nintendo Land* on the Wii U. It was also released on the Game Boy Advance as part of the *Famicom Mini Series* in Japan in 2004.

FALSION

■ DEVELOPER: KONAMI ■ YEAR: 1987



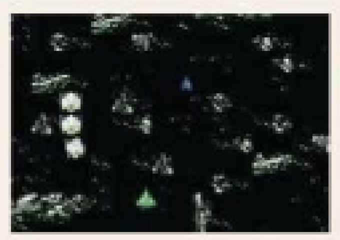
[Famicom Disk System] Luckily, *Falsion* is perfectly playable without the expensive 3D glasses.

■ **Another Konami-made Famicom Disk System exclusive, *Falsion* is unique in that it makes use of the Famicom 3D System headset, which used LCD shutter glasses to create the illusion of 3D depth – a technique not entirely dissimilar to that seen on Sega's Master System 3D glasses.**

Ironically, the reliance of 3D tech limited the game's appeal and it was never released outside of Japan. Taking inspiration from the likes of *Space Harrier*, *Falsion* adopts a third-person viewpoint, placing the camera directly behind the titular space craft. Enemies fly out of the screen towards the player, and can be shot down with lasers or homing missiles – the latter of which are limited in supply and give the game a similar feel to Sega's iconic *After Burner*. Power-up items make your ship faster or restock your missiles and each level has its own boss which must be defeated in order to progress. The game is perfectly playable without the 3D glasses, but its impact is undeniably diminished as a result. The presence of a craft named "Falchion β" – which looks the same as the ship in *Falsion* – in the 32-bit PlayStation title *Gradius Gaiden* has led many to consider this Famicom Disk System title a member of the *Gradius* series, which has only enhanced its appeal with collectors.

» HALLEY WARS

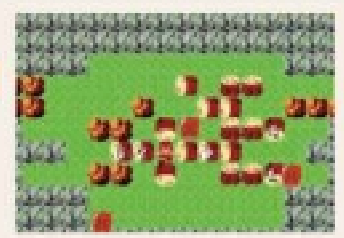
■ DEVELOPER: TAITO ■ YEAR: 1989



■ The sequel to the 1986 arcade game *Halley's Comet*, this vertically-scrolling shooter also saw release on the Sega Game Gear handheld. A highly entertaining blaster.

» SUPER BOY ALLAN

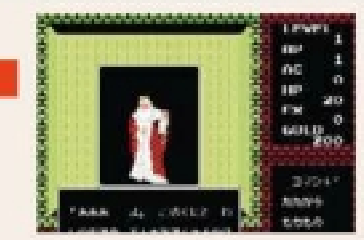
■ DEVELOPER: ASMIK ■ YEAR: 1987



■ An educational action game that features equations and fractions, *Super Boy Allan*'s main character traverses a *Zelda*-like world in search of a cure for his beloved sister.

» DEEP DUNGEON

■ DEVELOPER: HUMMINGBIRDSOFT ■ YEAR: 1986



■ A first-person RPG similar to *Wizardry* and *Dungeon Master*, *Deep Dungeon* started an entire series that continues to be popular in Japan even today.

» DOREMIKKO

■ DEVELOPER: KONAMI ■ YEAR: 1987



■ A music-creation game which shipped with a 36-button keyboard-style device for composing tunes. Yet another Konami exclusive that failed to make it out of Japan.



» SHIN ONIGASHIMA

■ DEVELOPER: NINTENDO EAD / PAX SOFTNICA ■ YEAR: 1987

■ ***Famicom Mukashi Banashi:*** *Shin Onigashima* – to give the game its full title – is actually two separate releases, both launched in Japan in September, 1987. A text adventure at heart, *Shin Onigashima* was created by Nintendo EAD's Tatsuya Hishida, who not only wrote the story but designed the characters as well. It's one of the only games that makes use of the Famicom Disk System's ability to swap disks when switched on – the second disk won't actually run without the first. The sequel, *Famicom Mukashi Banashi: Yuuyuuki* would follow in 1989 and used the same two-disk mechanic.



» SUISHŌ NO DRAGON

■ DEVELOPER: SQUARE ■ YEAR: 1986

■ **Unique for its** time, this adventure title boasts an icon-driven interface and a point-and-click-style cursor which can be moved using the joypad to examine objects of interest. Anime-style cutscenes from Japanese studio Nippon Sunrise help bring the game to life, and the wacky sci-fi setting was ahead of its time for a 1986 RPG release. Interestingly, Square released *Suishō No Dragon* (roughly translated as '*The Quartz Dragon*') under its DOG (Disk Original Group) label, which was established especially to create Famicom Disk System titles – a sign of just how big publishers and developers expected the format to be when it was released.



» TIME TWIST: REKISHI NO KATASUMI DE

■ DEVELOPER: NINTENDO EAD / PAX SOFTNICA ■ YEAR: 1991

■ **Like *Shin Onigashima*,** *Time Twist: Rekishi No Katasumi De* was released on two disks, the first of which has to be completed before the second one can be used. The game features time travel as it core story concept, with the player going back in time to meet with famous figures such as Joan of Arc, Adolf Hitler, Alexander the Great and even Jesus Christ. Released in July 1991 – eight months after the launch of the Super Famicom – it was the final packaged Famicom Disk System title and has since become quite a collector's item.



» ARMANA NO KISEKI

■ DEVELOPER: KONAMI ■ YEAR: 1987

■ **Clearly inspired by** the famous *Indiana Jones* films, *Armana No Kiseki* – also known as *Miracle Of Almana* – is an action platformer that sees the main character exploring underground caverns in search of treasure. The game's grappling hook mechanic borrows heavily from an earlier Konami release called *Roc 'N Rope*, which launched in arcades in 1983. The impressive visuals, tight gameplay and excellent music (composed by Kinuyo Yamashita) all combine to make this one of the Famicom Disk System's more enjoyable action titles – it's a real shame it never made its way over to the standard Famicom and NES as a cartridge release.



» EGGERLAND: SŌZŌHE NO TABIDACHI

■ DEVELOPER: HAL LABORATORY ■ YEAR: 1988

■ **Part of the** same series which includes the NES classic *Adventures Of Lolo*, *Eggerland: Sōzōhe No Tabidachi* (*Eggerland: Departure To Creation*) is a puzzle title set across 50 maps, many of which are recycled from the 1985 MSX prequel *Eggerland Mystery*. A construction mode allows you to create your own maps, and this level of customisation adds greatly to the game's longevity. A Game Boy entry appeared in 1994, but since 1996 instalments in the *Eggerland* series have remained exclusive to computers in Japan, with the last release – *Revival! Eggerland* – seeing the light of day in 2001.



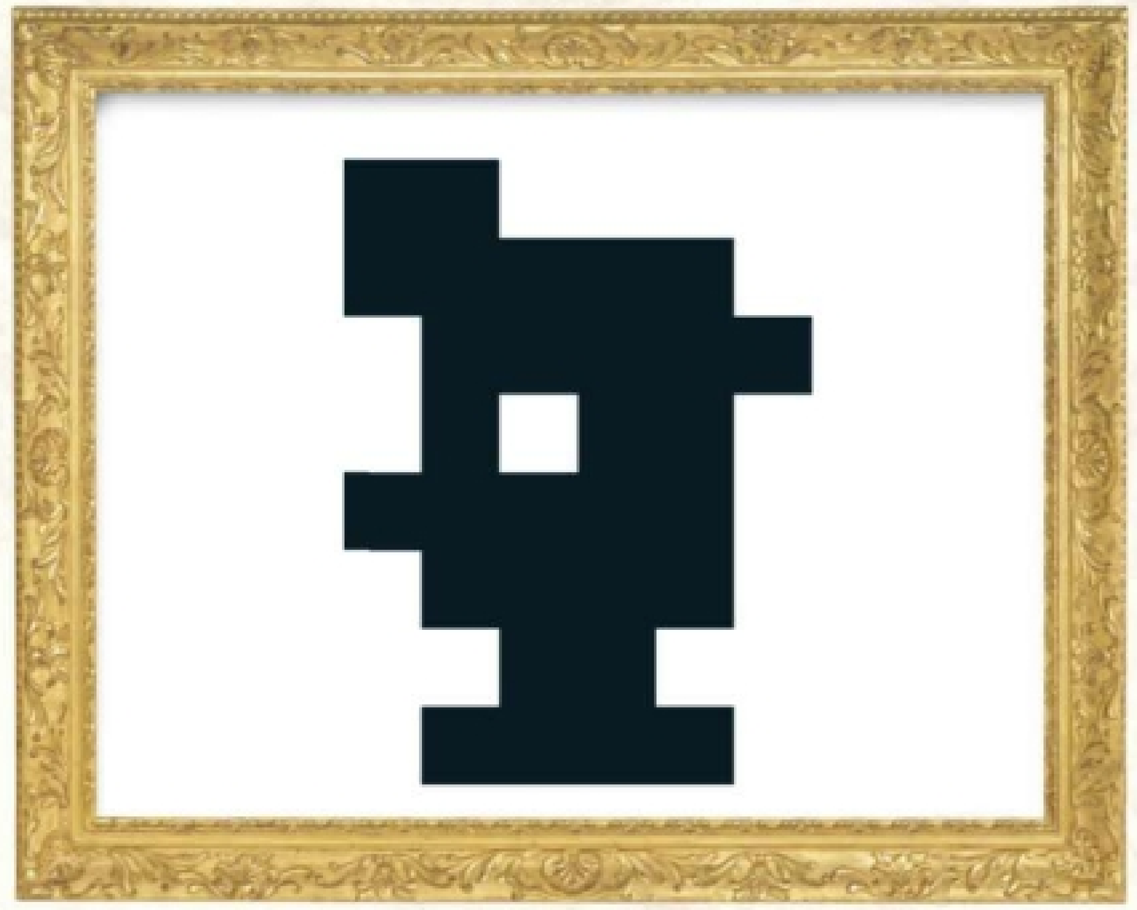
» FAMICOM GRAND PRIX II: 3D HOT RALLY

■ DEVELOPER: NINTENDO / HAL LABORATORY ■ YEAR: 1988

■ **The sequel to** *Famicom Grand Prix: F1 Race*, this title substitutes Formula One cars for dirt-loving rally vehicles. Mario and Luigi take starring roles, and the game is notable for making use of the Famicom 3D glasses to create an immersive 3D effect while racing. Like its forerunner, *Famicom Grand Prix II* came with support for the Disk Fax, which allowed high scores to be posted directly to Nintendo – a primitive form of the online leaderboards we enjoy in modern games. Because of this, it came on a blue disk – the final Famicom Disk System title to do so.









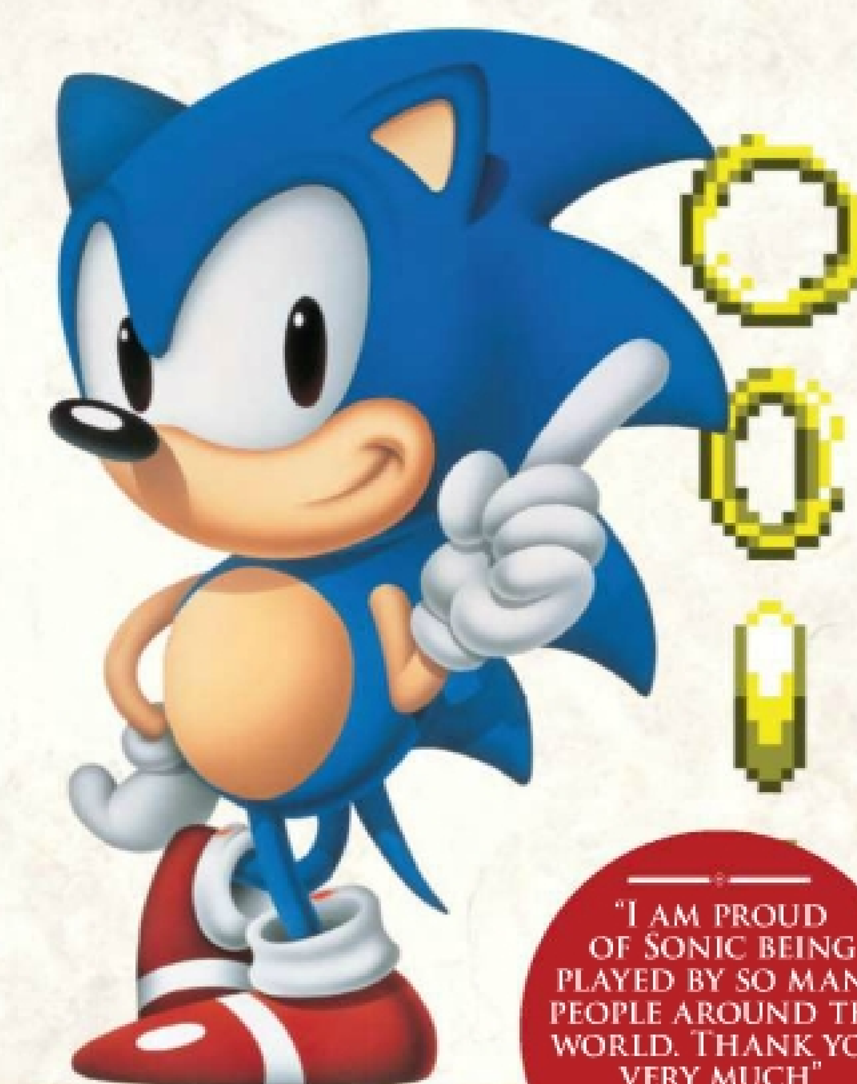
Your Videogame Icons

Curators Darran Jones and Damien McFerran walk you through a museum of some of gaming's greatest icons, as chosen by you



From the surreal adventures of Miner Willy to the platforming exploits of Mario, it would appear that everyone loves a good videogame hero. Some characters are simple products of their time, while others are carefully planned to compete against rival mascots. Some videogame heroes like Lara Croft helped redefine the perception of females in videogames, while the creation of Guybrush Threepwood stemmed from a simple love of pirates. No matter their origins, every single character over the following pages has become forever associated with videogames and, in the case of a select few, have outgrown the medium they started off in to become cultural icons in their own right. Mario, Pac-Man, Sonic, Lara Croft and even Master Chief have become superb examples of this, and their faces adorn everything from T-Shirts to lunch boxes. Although Mario predictably came out on top of your list, we were more interested in grouping classic characters together, like you might find in an actual museum. Join us then, as we reveal your personal favourites from the last 30 odd years of gaming…





"I AM PROUD OF SONIC BEING PLAYED BY SO MANY PEOPLE AROUND THE WORLD. THANK YOU VERY MUCH"

Yuji Naka, clearly pleased that people still love Sonic

Sonic The Hedgehog

■ FIRST APPEARANCE: RAD MOBILE ■ YEAR: 1991

It's rather fitting to start off with one of the most recognisable videogame characters of all time in our museum of the stars.

Regardless of whether you feel his newer outings are up to the same standards as his Mega Drive glory years, there's no denying the sheer impact that Sonic has had over the past two decades. Virtually every aspect of Sonic's creation was designed with one goal in mind, to become a rival to Mario. As a result he went through numerous design changes, including a dog and even an armadillo, before Sega eventually settled on its iconic blue hedgehog that is now as unmistakable as Sega's own logo.

Unlike Mario, Sonic was edgy. He was cool, streetwise and a world away from Nintendo's friendly plumber, and gamers loved him for it. When you think of Sonic you think of speed, a spunky attitude and those glory days (if you were in team Sega) when Sonic's staggering success allowed Sega to claw back the console market share that Nintendo had dominated for so long.

Sonic soon outgrew the Mega Drive, moving onto comics, cartoons and replacing Alex Kidd as Sega's mascot. A position he still holds today. You see Sonic long before you see Sega's UK office and his popular arms-crossed pose is a constant reminder of the inherent coolness that never rubbed off on the many other sidekicks that Sonic has been saddled with over the years.

He admittedly lost some of his charm once he finally found his voice (something that many videogame characters have been guilty of) and he's squarely aimed at the younger generation now, but it's hard not to look at Sega's mascot and not get excited. Few other characters say 'videogames' as well as Sonic. Not bad for a character who started off as 'Mr Needlemouse'.

8-bit heroes

From the vine-swinging exploits of Pitfall Harry to the pill-munching madness of Pac-Man, we highlight gaming's earliest celebrities



> "The hardware limitation of the Atari 2600 dictated everything. Every frame of Harry's animation had to fit in an eight pixel wide by 16 half-pixel tall space"
>
> David Crane on creating Pitfall Harry

Pitfall Harry

■ FIRST APPEARANCE: PITFALL! ■ YEAR: 1982

When David Crane hastily sketched out the concept of Pitfall Harry, little did he know that his hero's debut adventure would go on to shift over 4 million units. Pitfall Harry tapped into the public's hunger for adventurers like Indiana Jones and became an unofficial mascot for Activision, appearing on numerous ads, flyers, merchandise and even a cartoon (*Saturday Supercade*, which also featured segments on *Donkey Kong*, *Q*bert* and *Frogger* amongst others). He's arguably dipped in popularity in recent years – his latest adventure, the highly enjoyable *Pitfall!* was confined to mobile devices – but it's clear that you still have plenty of love for one of gaming's oldest adventurers.

Dizzy

■ FIRST APPEARANCE: DIZZY ■ YEAR: 1987

His Kickstarter may have recently crashed and burned, but there's still plenty of love for Dizzy if your votes is anything to go by. Dizzy comes from that magical time in gaming where even an egg wearing boxing gloves could turn into a celebrity. First created by the Oliver twins for Codemasters in 1987, Dizzy took a little while to catch on but steadily built a cult following, ensuring that many of his sequels went to the top of their respective charts. We're unlikely to ever see a brand new adventure, but the iOS remake of *Prince Of The Yolkfolk* at least allows him to be enjoyed by a new generation of gamers.





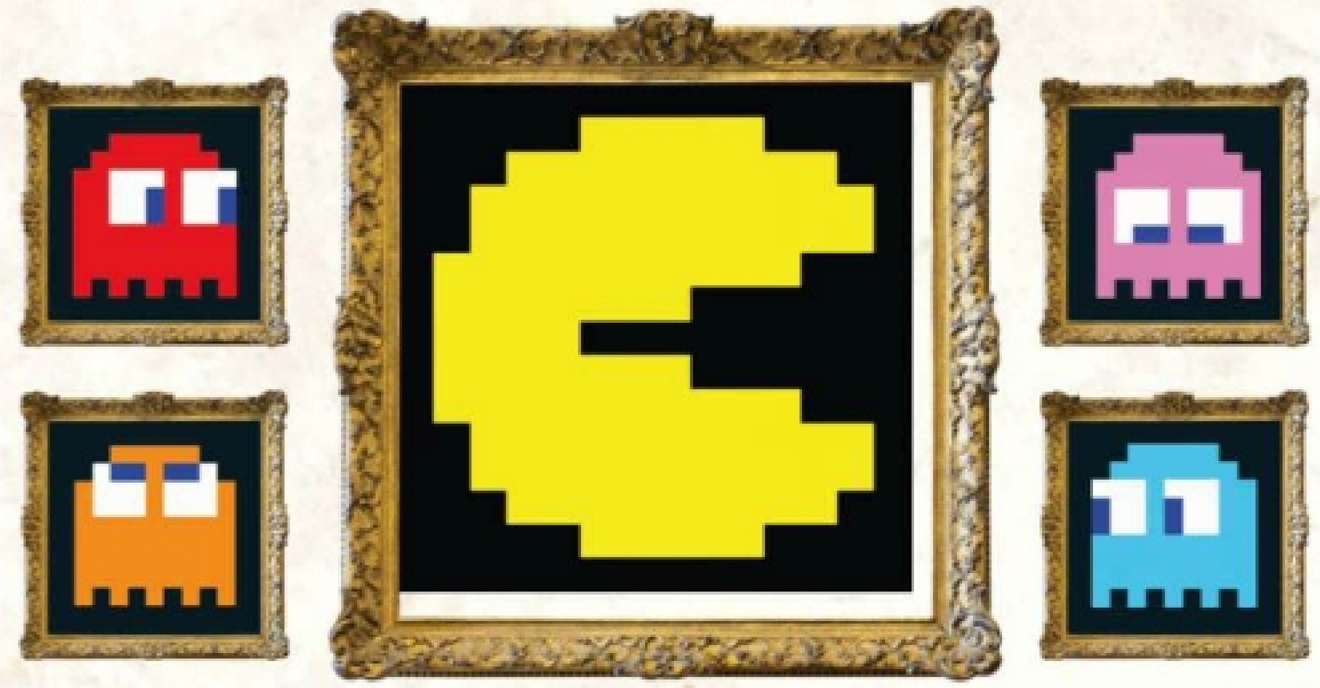
Miner Willy

■ FIRST APPEARANCE: MANIC MINER ■ YEAR: 1983

Few computer characters are as recognisable as Matthew Smith's Miner Willy. Like many videogame heroes of the Eighties, he's definitely a product of his time, but he also represents what many consider to be a golden age of gaming. *Manic Miner* was a huge hit on the Spectrum, with Matthew Smith's surreal sprite designs and masterfully designed levels combining to create one of the system's defining games.

Although not the most original of characters – Smith's hero and his game were partly inspired by Bill Hogue's *Miner 2049er* – Willy went on to become a far more iconic figure, partly due to having a half-decent back story, but mainly due to the eccentricity of Smith, who became arguably as iconic over the intervening years as the character he had first created.

A humble miner by trade, Miner Willy is one of many popular videogame characters whose gameplay sprung from a distinctive working class background. Only in this case, Willy does good, eventually finding a fortune and going on to own a gigantic mansion which would form the basis for his two sequels, *Jet Set Willy 1* and *2*.



Pac-Man

■ FIRST APPEARANCE: PAC-MAN ■ YEAR: 1980

Pac-Man is one of gaming's earliest characters, so it's hardly surprising that he remains so firmly entrenched in the memory of today's gamers. Only Sonic and Mario received more votes from you, which is an impressive achievement for a character that was partly inspired by a simple slice of pizza. The reason behind Pac-Man's success and subsequent popularity was not the fact that he was instantly recognisable – although we'd argue that it certainly helped him – but that he was accessible to any gamer, regardless of their gender or skill.

Scant months after *Pac-Man*'s release, Namco realised it had a huge hit on its hands and it soon began to crank out sequels and merchandise over the intervening years. Even today, Pac-Man merchandise is everywhere, with his cute yellow fizzog appearing on everything from clocks to cufflinks and stress balls – ensuring that he's never far from the public eye. This constant public reminder is due in part to Namco's cleverness at constantly bringing its mascot back in new games every few years. He's appeared in over 30 officially licensed games since his 1980 debut, while the 2007 smash hit *Pac-Man Championship Edition* endeared him to a whole new generation of gamers.

Today he remains a massive cultural icon, having appeared in cartoons, music – from Buckner & Garcia's *Pac-Man Fever* to Aphex Twin's *Pac-Man* album in 1992 – and even movies like *Scott Pilgrim Vs The World*. Even our 92-year-old Nan knows about Pac-Man, a further testament to just how popular the yellow dot muncher actually is, even now.

> "I had ordered a round pizza and it was missing a piece. The shape of what is now Pac-Man flashed through my mind"
>
> Tōru Iwatani on Pac-Man's bizarre inception

Mega Man

■ FIRST APPEARANCE: MEGA MAN ■ YEAR: 1987

Few characters have fallen as far as Mega Man has in the last ten years. Back in the Eighties and early Nineties he was a massive deal, having appeared in six NES games which in turn led to him becoming Capcom's official mascot. Instantly recognisable thanks to his natty blue threads and the fact that his right arm is a huge cannon, yearly updates kept him popular with gamers, while his unique ability to steal the weapons of bosses he had defeated made him a highly adaptable and versatile hero. While he's faced some embarrassing cancellations in recent years, the massive cheer that announced his appearance in *Super Smash Bros* suggests he still has plenty of fans.



Space Invader

■ FIRST APPEARANCE: SPACE INVADERS

■ YEAR: 1979

This guy is the only one you voted for that you don't actually control in a game, making him an odd inclusion. Despite this, there's no denying his credentials, with the instantly recognisable sprite having appeared on all sorts of merchandise from T-shirts to watches in the past 35 years.



Sabreman

■ FIRST APPEARANCE: SABRE WULF

■ YEAR: 1984

We'd wager that it was Sabreman's versatility that made him popular. He'd try he hand at all sorts of genres – from maze games to isometric adventures – while retaining his distinctly British look. It's hard to believe that it's been nine years since his Game Boy Advance adventure *Sabre Wulf*.



Bub & Bob

■ FIRST APPEARANCE: BUBBLE BOBBLE

■ YEAR: 1979

Toejam and Earl certainly tried, but Bub and Bob were the only double act to make your list. Cute and with a penchant for blowing bubbles, these lovable tykes have appeared in countless games over the years, ensuring that everyone still fondly remembers them.



Monty Mole

■ FIRST APPEARANCE: WANTED: MONTY MOLE

■ YEAR: 1984

The miners' strike was the backdrop for Monty Mole's plot, turning him into a character that many at the time could relate to. He remains one of the few videogame characters to actively court the controversy of politics.



Horace

■ FIRST APPEARANCE: HUNGRY HORACE

■ YEAR: 1982

We've never quite understood what Horace actually is, likening him to a strange walking arse. Confusion aside, it is Horace's sheer diversity that makes him so memorable. Whether he's skiing, running around mazes or avoiding spiders he was always Horace, and we loved him for it.



Newer heroes

As gaming grew up, so too did its protagonists, gaining the power of speech and plenty of other cool tricks that set them apart from earlier icons

LARA CROFT

■ FIRST APPEARANCE: TOMB RAIDER ■ YEAR: 1996

Lara Croft is the most important female game character of all time, proving that anything men could do in games, girls could do just as well. So much more than just 'Indiana Jones with boobs', Lara instantly stood apart from other characters of the time thanks to her aristocratic roots, distinct English accent and the fact that she starred in a genuinely groundbreaking videogame. While the original incarnation of Lara wasn't as well fleshed out as Rhianna Pratchett's 2013 version, there were enough insights into her background to make her far more dynamic than many of her peers. Inspired by both Jamie Hewlett's Tank Girl and the pop star Neneh Cherry, creator Toby Gard created Lara to be a counterpoint to all the flimsily-dressed female characters that were prevalent at the time. Lara epitomised the same 'girl power' which had powered the Spice Girls to global success, being a heroine that was just at home exploring ancient civilisations as she was in Croft Manor, and she eventually became bigger than the games she starred in. Movies were made, countless sequels were delivered – first by Core Design and later by Crystal Dynamics – models were used to portray her in real life and she even made the cover of non-gaming magazines like *The Face*. She lost her way with Core, when the emphasis was more on her breast size than her adventures, but Rhianna Pratchett got her back on track with last year's *Tomb Raider* reboot.





"THE GRAVELLY VOICE, THE FLOWING BANDANA, THE BIZARRE FRIENDS HE KEEPS AND THE ENEMIES HE MAKES... SNAKE IS JUST A BADASS. IT REALLY IS THAT SIMPLE"

Play magazine's Luke Albigés sums Snake up perfectly

RYU

■ FIRST APPEARANCE: STREET FIGHTER ■ YEAR: 1987

A wandering fighter who desires nothing more than to be the master of his craft, Ryu's determined stare is almost as iconic as his white karate gi and red gloves. Since his debut in 1987's *Street Fighter*, Ryu has been an ever-present face in the series, right up to the present day. His 'Hadouken' fireball is one of the most instantly recognisable – not to mention copied – special moves in the one-on-one fighting genre, and his 'Shoryuken' Dragon Punch is deadly when used at the right time. Friend and rival Ken Masters shares the same moves and basic sprite design, and is almost as famous.



SOLID SNAKE

■ FIRST APPEARANCE: METAL GEAR

■ YEAR: 1987

A master of tactical espionage and blessed with one of the gruffest voices in videogames, Snake made his debut in the 1987 MSX2 title *Metal Gear* but would find global fame in the 1998 PlayStation title *Metal Gear Solid*. Since then, Snake's adventures have sold over 30 million copies, making him one of video gaming's most bankable stars – he's even bagged himself a cameo in Nintendo's famous *Smash Bros* series alongside Sonic. *Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain* will take Snake (well, one version of him, anyway) into the next generation, and will no doubt illustrate why he's become such an iconic creation. Not bad for a character that's blatantly modeled on Kurt Russell's turn as Snake Plissken in *Escape From New York*.

GUYBRUSH THREEPWOOD

■ FIRST APPEARANCE:

THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND

■ YEAR: 1991

Guybrush is one of gaming's funniest characters. Whether he's engaging in insult-sword fighting or pottering around the Caribbean, he's never far from a pithy one-liner. Dominic Armato may have given him a voice but Ron Gilbert, Guybrush's creator, gave him life.





DOOMGUY

■ FIRST APPEARANCE: DOOM

■ YEAR: 1993

Thanks to *Doom's* first-person viewpoint you *were* Doomguy. It's a great trick, and as he rips his way through all and sundry you're filled with a huge sense of empowerment. Doomguy is a man of action, and his silent but deadly approach would be aped by other characters for years to come.

GORDON FREEMAN

■ FIRST APPEARANCE:

HALF-LIFE

■ YEAR: 1998

When Valve unleashed Gordon Freeman upon the world, it proved that you didn't need words to tell a story. Gordon doesn't utter a single word, but you bond with him nonetheless. Like *Doom's* iconic marine, he proves that actions speak louder than words.





DUKE NUKEM

■ FIRST APPEARANCE:

DUKE NUKEM

■ YEAR: 1991

The Duke is very much a product of his time, a point made painfully obvious in 2011 when his misogynist attitudes and lack of political correctness in *Duke Nukem Forever* were as negatively received as its gameplay. Yes, he's not very PC, but it appears you're as forgiving of his vulgarity as we are.

ULALA

■ FIRST APPEARANCE:

SPACE CHANNEL 5

■ YEAR: 1999

Sega's cute *Space Channel 5* news reporter was allegedly based on Deee-Lite's Lady Miss Kier, who went on to file a lawsuit against Sega. She lost her case, and Ulala went on to star in two sequels and a host of cameo appearances in later Sega games.



CLOUD STRIFE

■ FIRST APPEARANCE: FINAL FANTASY VII ■ YEAR: 1997

We were rather surprised at the inclusion of Cloud Strife in your final selection as he's a hard character to love. Unlike many featured here he's something of a moody sod, full of clichéd teenage angst that initially makes him a very difficult hero to like, even if he does depict the epitome of cool with his spiky quiff and huge sword.

We say initially, because Cloud has one of the best transformations of any videogame character from his period – slowly transforming into a layered hero that you can really get behind. Yes he remains surly and aloof at times, and yes he never really manages to exude the coolness of his dark mirror, Sephiroth, but his well-written background gives you a keen insight into his character and really allows you to connect to him on a personal level. It's a clever piece of writing that in some ways makes him far more relatable than more popular icons like Mario.

"THE ONLY THING THAT WE HAD TO CHANGE DURING DEVELOPMENT WAS THE LEVEL OF DEFORMATION ON THE CHARACTERS"

Yoshinori Kitase on Cloud's many different looks





MASTER CHIEF

■ FIRST APPEARANCE:

HALO: COMBAT EVOLVED

■ YEAR: 2001

It's hardly surprising that such a new character powered his way into your hearts. For the last 12 years, Master Chief has been as representative of videogames as Mario, Sonic or Pac-Man. Iconic thanks to his timeless armour and *that* helmet, Master Chief – or Petty Officer John-117 as he's known to his friends – may be a man of few words, but he doesn't need them. Master Chief, like the *Doom* marine and Gordon Freeman before him, is a man of action, but he continues to expand his vocabulary with each new adventure.

The Nintendo difference

Nintendo's characters were voted for so often by you that it only seemed right to give them their very own gallery



Donkey Kong

■ FIRST APPEARANCE: DONKEY KONG ■ YEAR: 1981

Shigeru Miyamoto's first smash-hit video game for Nintendo, *Donkey Kong*, marked the first appearance of both the titular ape and Mario himself – making it one of the most significant games in the history of the Japanese company. Shown as a dumb and spiteful monster in the original titles, Donkey Kong would later rise to heroic stardom as part of the *Donkey Kong Country* series, which started on the SNES and has since moved onto the Wii, Wii U and 3DS.



Samus Aran

■ FIRST APPEARANCE: METROID
■ YEAR: 1986

Few videogame twists can match that moment at the end of *Metroid* when you realise that the beefy space marine you've been controlling is in fact a woman in a bikini. It's little wonder then that bounty hunter Samus Aran has become one of Nintendo's most celebrated – not to mention controversial – characters. *Super Metroid* cemented Aran's status as a superstar, while the *Metroid Prime* trilogy took her to new levels of fame. 2010's *Metroid: Other M* divided opinion however, giving Samus a voice for the first time as well as a slightly annoying characterisation.

Link

■ FIRST APPEARANCE: THE LEGEND OF ZELDA ■ YEAR: 1986

Like so many of Nintendo's most famous characters, Link began life as a blob of pixels in a visually primitive 8-bit world, but has since grown to become one of the company's most deep and complex talents. His podgy appearance in the early NES titles has since given way to a mature and edgy design, but recent outings such as *The Wind Waker* and *Phantom Hourglass* have allowed Link to return to his endearing roots. Held in higher regard by many Nintendo fans than even Mario, Link is a true videogaming legend.



Mario

■ FIRST APPEARANCE: DONKEY KONG ■ YEAR: 1981

It was almost a foregone conclusion that Mario would top your list; Nintendo's plump plumber is unquestionably one of the most iconic faces in popular culture, not just in videogames. Since Nintendo's rise to power in the Eighties, Mario has appeared in some of the best pieces of interactive entertainment ever created, and has even been gifted with a Hollywood outing – although the less said about that, the better.

Although Mario started out in titles like *Donkey Kong* and *Mario Bros*, it was 1985's *Super Mario Bros* that truly set him apart from the legions of other cute and cuddly mascots. The first game to feature jumping on the heads of enemies – now a platform gaming staple – the 8-bit classic sold millions and contributed to the NES' vice-like grip on the marketplace. Sequels inevitably followed, and for many players there is no finer 2D platformer than *Super Mario World*, a SNES launch title that challenged players with finding 96 different exits in the game's massive world.

While many 8 and 16-bit characters struggled to adapt to 3D, Mario made the leap (no pun intended) with assured aplomb. *Super Mario 64* remains one of the finest games of all time and has been improved upon by the likes of *Super Mario Sunshine* and *Super Mario Galaxy* on the GameCube and Wii respectively.

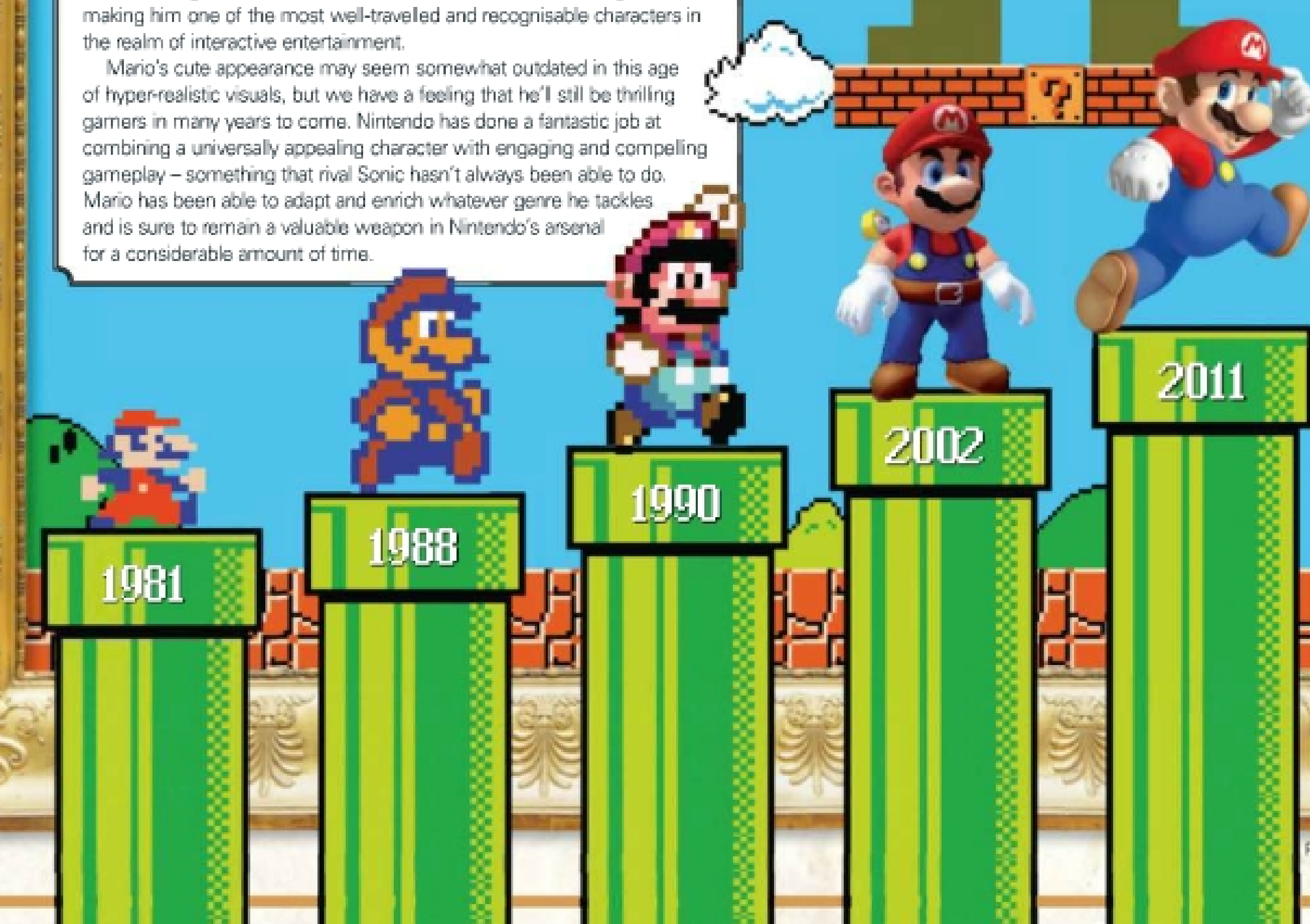
Of course, Mario's career hasn't been restricted to just platform games; he's also a keen racer in the *Mario Kart* series and has tried his hand at medicine (*Dr Mario*), art (*Mario Paint*) and sport (*Mario Golf, Mario Tennis, Super Mario Strikers*) – proving that he's not just handy at fixing your taps and saving princesses. Mario's illustrious CV also includes the likes of *Super Mario RPG, Paper Mario* and *Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga* – although in the latter game he is forced to share screen time with his taller, thinner sibling. All in all, Mario has starred in over 200 different games, making him one of the most well-travelled and recognisable characters in the realm of interactive entertainment.

Mario's cute appearance may seem somewhat outdated in this age of hyper-realistic visuals, but we have a feeling that he'll still be thrilling gamers in many years to come. Nintendo has done a fantastic job at combining a universally appealing character with engaging and compelling gameplay – something that rival Sonic hasn't always been able to do. Mario has been able to adapt and enrich whatever genre he tackles and is sure to remain a valuable weapon in Nintendo's arsenal for a considerable amount of time.

"SUPER MARIO 64 WAS THE FIRST GAME, I THINK, THAT REALLY MADE A CHARACTER OUT OF HIM, FOR EXAMPLE WHEN HE SPOKE ON THE TITLE SCREEN OF THE GAME. IF ANYTHING, ESPECIALLY IN THE USA, I THINK HE HAS BECOME THE ICON OF NINTENDO"

David Braben pinpoints the success of Mario







The Apprentice

LOOKS CAN BE DECEIVING...

RETROREVIVAL

» Amstrad CPC 464
» Mastertronic
» 1986

Mastertronic's *The Apprentice* taught me a very important life lesson: never judge a videogame by its cover.

I received my Amstrad CPC for my 14th birthday, and while I was gutted that I'd been saddled with a green screen monitor, I took solace in the fact that a mistake at Rumbelows meant I had double the amount of Amsoft games than I should have.

Of course, being a typical teenager, the games I had – and there were a lot, ranging from classics like *Roland On The Ropes* and *Oh Mummy* to dross like *Bridge-It* – weren't adequate and I simply had to buy a new game. Any game, it didn't matter what, I just had to spend all of my birthday money as quickly as possible.

Arriving in Poole town centre I began to look at the rows and rows of cassette tapes and my gaze fell on *The Apprentice*. It immediately caught my eye thanks to its *Fantasia*-like cover, while the shots on the back suggested the brilliance of *Sorcery*.

Sadly, a suggestion of *Sorcery* was all it was. Everything about *The Apprentice* was awful, from the slow-as-molasses movement of your main character to its horribly designed rooms. Monsters would instantly kill you if you entered a screen at the wrong point, while the inventory system (you could only carry one item at a time) and unfair collision detection made you want to cry. I was a lot more careful with my second purchase, and never got suckered in by a cover ever again. ★

"SEE YOU ON THE BEACH"

From the million-selling Beach Head to pioneering games like Leaderboard, Links and the Tex Murphy series, Access Software was always ahead of the curve with its product line. Mike Bevan looks back on the legacy of Bruce Carver's celebrated company

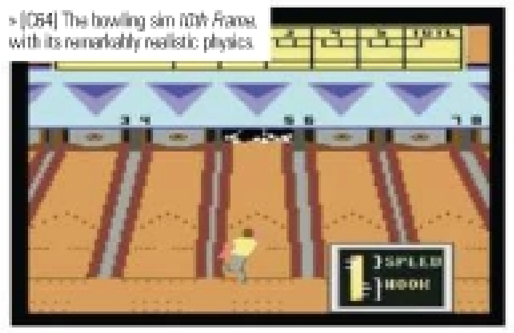
Steve Witzel recounts, "I actually sold Bruce Carver his first Commodore 64." This, we infer, was possibly the same machine used to create *Beach Head*, the game that first brought the Access Software brand fame and commercial success.

"I owned a retail computer store, Computers Plus, in Midvale, a suburb of Salt Lake City," Steve explains. "A lot of people with 64s were just hungry for information. People wanted to know everything about the inside of the machine and Commodore wasn't very forthcoming. Bruce was an engineer with a local firm called Redd Engineering, doing large construction projects, and he bought the 64 and really got interested in learning to program."

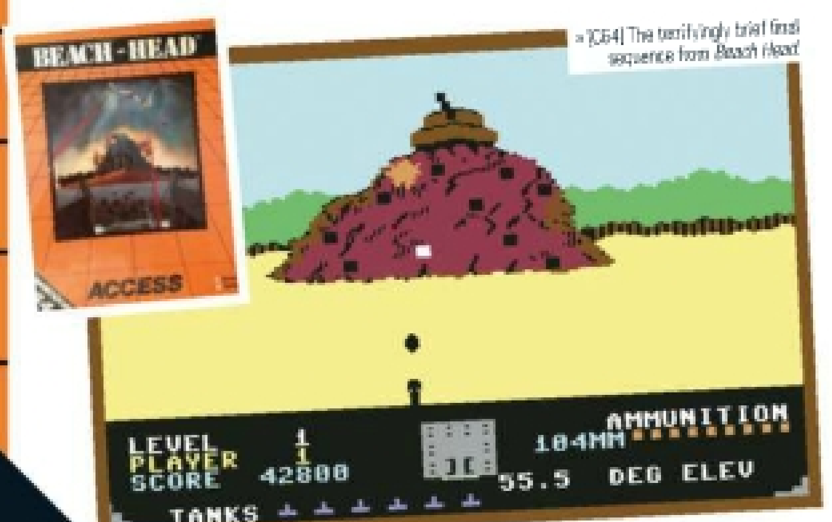
With his background in electrical engineering, Steve's knowledgeable demeanour meant that C64 owners were often coming into the store to glean technical information and swap programming tips for the machine. "Bruce wrote a little sprite-editing program and brought that in, and I gave him a few ideas and said 'If you made a few adjustments, you know we would sell this product in the store,'" he recalls. "And he was quite surprised and went back and made those changes, and when we started selling the program he got very excited…"

It was, as they say, the beginning of a beautiful friendship. Bruce's program, Spritemaster, sold well enough to convince him that there might be something in this home computer programming lark, specifically on the C64. "The Access Software brand was born with Spritemaster," says Steve. "Bruce kept doing his day job and started on his next game [a *Star Trek*-inspired 3D shooter called *Neutral Zone*.] He came back and said 'you know, I really don't know how to sell' so we started a consulting relationship. I was helping him set up distribution networks, and then when the program started to sell he came back and said 'I'm having trouble copying the tapes, our audio-duplicators just aren't working well enough.' We finally felt we hit the big-time when I designed a little device for him that allowed him to copy six cassettes at once. We started getting quite a large distribution network and he decided to quit his day job, and the owners of Redd actually invested money in Access."

Co-founder of Access Chris Jones remembers, "In the early days, we worked out of Bruce's basement." While employed as an accountant at Redd Engineering, Chris partnered with Bruce in order to handle the business side of the company. "We were duplicating the games for distribution; designing box art, advertising art, everything… it was a true basement operation. When Bruce developed *Neutral Zone* it did reasonably well which gave us some breathing room and we could bring others aboard to help with sales."



» [C64] The bowling sim *10th Frame*, with its remarkably realistic physics.



» [C64] The terrifyingly brief final sequence from *Beach Head*.

INSTANT EXPERT

- Access Software was founded by engineer Bruce Carver and business partner Chris Jones in Salt Lake City, Utah. The company was incorporated in November 1982 on a start-up budget of $25,000.
- The name Access was chosen after Bruce and his friends scanned through a dictionary looking for the perfect title for the business. Alternative names that were considered were Action Software and Center Soft.
- The company is best known for C64 titles like *Beach Head*, *Raid Over Moscow* and *Leaderboard*, the PC golf franchise *Links* and the critically acclaimed *Tex Murphy* detective-noir adventure series, of which five games were released.
- In the UK, Access Software products were distributed by US Gold, starting with *Beach Head*. The UK-based distributor struck a deal with Ocean Software, which converted games like *Beach Head* and *Raid Over Moscow* to the Spectrum and Amstrad CPC for the European market.
- The speech in the C64 version of *Beach Head II* was the voice of Doug Vandergrift, the artist who designed most of Access Software's packaging and was Art Director for the first two *Tex Murphy* games.

Although simplistic, *Neutral Zone* demonstrated a key aspect of Bruce's developing skill as a game designer – attention to detail and the integration of lifelike physics – something that had been engrained in him through his role as an engineer. Players fired projectiles that flew in a parabolic trajectory at enemy targets, a feature that would re-emerge in the most famous section of *Beach Head*, along with *Neutral Zone*'s filter-heavy explosion effects, born from his experiments with the C64's SID chip.

"We had talked about a game centred on a World War II concept, which eventually became *Beach Head*," recalls Chris. "That game did incredibly well and put us on the map. It also gave us an opportunity to get in with chain stores and major distributors."

Beach Head also marked the start of a profitable relationship with the UK-based distributor US Gold, the company that would market many of Access Software's future products in Europe.

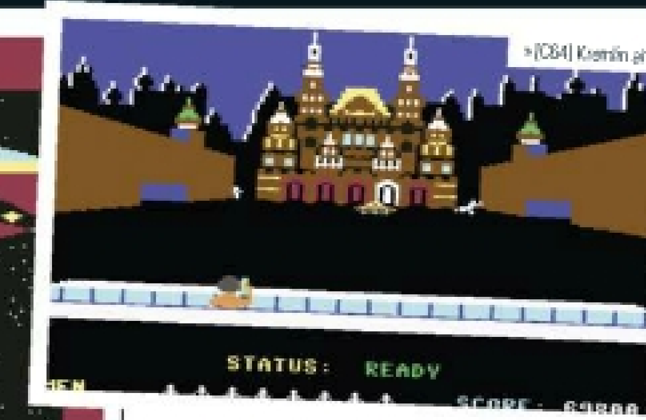
"I had this picture in my mind of the player shooting down enemy aircraft from a ship," Bruce stated in a 1987 interview with *Commodore Magazine*. "Once I had thought out the anti-aircraft idea, everything else revolved around that central theme. [Chris and I] were both old war movie fans, and *Beach Head* was the perfect outlet for our imaginations. It allowed us to take our favourite film scenes, translate them to graphics and actually participate in the action."

"*Beach Head* C64 was the game that stands out for me personally," says US Gold's founder, Geoff Brown. "I couldn't believe how fantastic it looked with smooth animation and very realistic graphics. The gameplay was like nothing I had ever seen in the UK, streets ahead of the competing UK product. I seem to remember guaranteeing to sell 100,000 units… it eventually sold over a million. Bruce Carver shook my hand and the game shook up the UK C64 market. A few days later I took it to a UK games show where the whole stand was just a portable table with a C64 running the game. I recall Anil Gupta of Anirog Software coming to look at the game and telling me later that he went back to his guys and told them to scrap everything they were working on. The bar had been raised…"

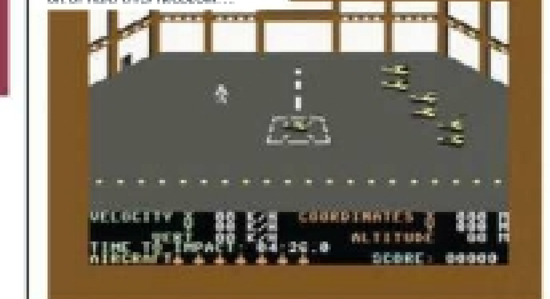
> **"US Gold believed that any publicity was good publicity"**
> CHRIS JONES



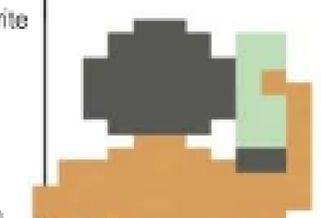
» [C64] Bruce Carver's debut game for Access, *Neutral Zone*, owes an obvious debt to *Star Trek*



» [C64] Kremlin ahoy!



» [C64] Everybody just loved this bit of *Raid Over Moscow*…



With *Beach Head*, Bruce seemed to have hit on a sure-fire design formula, linking a collection of diverse game sequences within a military-inspired storyline, dressed with, what were for their time, cutting-edge graphics. And despite receiving some input from Chris and Steve, Bruce, a renowned perfectionist, would do all the coding and graphics on his early C64 games by himself.

"The only artist we had on staff was Doug Vandegrift," says Steve. "He was part-time and still worked at Redd and did all the covers for the Access games up until the last five or six years. He was actually an Emmy award-winning artist."

Access's next game reprised this successful multi-game approach, moving from the D-Day-inspired setting of *Beach Head* to a rather more controversial Cold War-themed action game. With a ludicrous plot on par with the John Milius movie *Red Dawn*, *Raid Over Moscow* saw you striking back at the Russian capital in a futuristic fighter craft, in order to prevent nuclear bombardment from those pesky Soviets. It's easy to look back on the game as a bit of harmless fun, but it's worth remembering that, following the shooting down of an unarmed Korean airliner by a Russian Su-15, and the country's invasion of Afghanistan, US-Soviet relations were extremely sensitive to say the least.

"US Gold believed that any publicity was good publicity," says Chris. "They felt like they could get the product noticed on the map by 'protesting' in front of the Russian Embassy in London. This was during the Reagan years so there was high tension between the US and Russia. However, the controversy did get us noticed and helped prop up sales. And since it didn't ignite a war, I guess it worked out…" The game was another hit for Access, despite the negative reaction, especially in Finland; where panicked ministers debated it in parliament, and in Germany; where Access was forced to re-title it simply *Raid*.

More controversial to actual players was the opening of the game, where you had to wrestle the inertial joystick controls of your ship while pressing a function key to open the hanger doors of the launch bay. "To my mind they made a few things too hard,"

REMEMBERING BRUCE CARVER

"Bruce was a multi-tasker," says his brother Roger. "As we grew, he did less programming, but he was always involved with design. In the end, he didn't have the time to program. He was a great manager of people and a great designer. It wasn't so much computers, but how everything worked. He could really do anything."

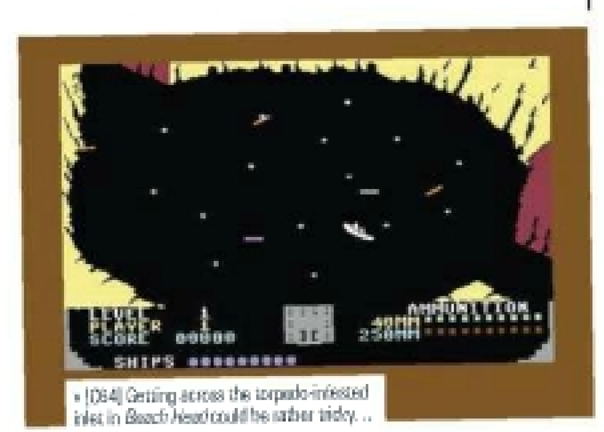
"Bruce was a great family man, had a wonderful sense of humour and was a tough competitor in any game that we played," adds Chris Jones. "In terms of the business, he was incredibly smart and multi-talented and could do all the art, music and programming for the games.

"I was always amazed at how the images on the screen felt so three-dimensional in the environments that we were restricted to because of primitive computing power. His unique talents of engineering and his art allowed him to create illusions that were remarkable. We would come up with a game design and then he would take it from there.

"The only way one person could accomplish this was to be born with an unbelievable work ethic, and Bruce could work anyone under the table. He was truly one of a kind."



» Bruce Carver video-taping Roger's golf swing for *Leaderboard*.



» [C64] Getting across the torpedo-infested inlet in *Beach Head* could be rather tricky…

"We started by filming my swing against a brick wall with a VHS camera"
ROGER CARVER

reasons Steve. "It was too hard to get out of the hanger at the start of the game. People just wanted to play and have fun."

Meanwhile, Bruce had talked with his brother Roger, a US Navy programmer working on mainframe flight simulators, about joining the company. His first assignment was creating the distinctive title screen for *Raid Over Moscow*. "I was the fifth employee at Access if you include Bruce and Chris Jones," adds Brent Erickson, who also joined the company that year. "Roger Carver was there as well as Kevin Homer. We worked out of the top floor of the Redd Engineering building."

"Bruce and Roger were definitely highly technical," says Brent. "From my perspective, Bruce would take on the highest technical aspects (anything involving lots of math or complicated logic) and Roger would focus on things like animation systems or game mechanics. It's really hard to pin it down like that, however, because we all just did what was needed."

"At the time, the technical information about how to use the hardware sprites [on the C64] was not well known. I don't even think the C64 programmer's reference manual had been published. Bruce spent a lot of time just plugging values into registers to figure out what it would do. That curiosity was probably the true catalyst to Access's formation. Roger was an excellent golfer and really helped make *Leaderboard* and *Links* feel and look right."

On their way to the fair greens of *Leaderboard*, Roger and Bruce teamed up for another bout of military shenanigans with *Beach Head II: The Dictator Strikes Back*. More accomplished than it predecessor, with better long-term playability, impressive and sometimes hilarious digitised speech and an excellent two-player mode, the game garnered Access their best reviews yet. This included a 90 per cent score and Sizzler award from *Zzap!64*. It marked another technical breakthrough – the little stick men on the opening stage had been animated using real-life footage of Bruce, Roger, and Chris running around a local park, translated from still frames of video tape, a technique later used to create the lifelike animation in *Leaderboard*. Unfortunately, *Beach Head II* didn't sell as well as the original game, or *Raid Over Moscow*, leading Bruce and Roger to wonder if war-based games had finally run their course.



» [C64] Some of *Leaderboard*'s more difficult courses were rather water-trap heavy…

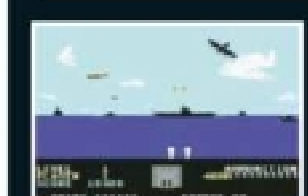


» Access Software's game covers were designed by ex-DC and Marvel artist Doug Vandegrift, a mutual friend of Bruce and Chris's.

By this point, Steve Witzel had closed his computer store in order to work on a full-time basis at Access. He started on technical projects like the Mach 5 fast-load cartridge for the C64 before moving into a marketing management role. "*Leaderboard* was Bruce's idea," he tells us, revealing the origin of Access's famous golfing sim. "Before *Leaderboard*, he and Roger did a bowling game [*10th Frame*] and Bruce spent a lot of time on the mathematics because of his engineering background. By the time he went into *Leaderboard*, that was his forte – the ball flight dynamics and physics of the game. At that point it really set it apart from other games."

It certainly did – *Leaderboard* was a revolutionary progression for sport simulations, from its control system to its pioneering three-dimensional terrain mapping, cramming a staggering amount of course detail into the humble C64. "There were other golf games, but they were all done from an overhead perspective," Chris comments. "Bruce wanted to do it from a golfer perspective."

DEFINING GAMES



Beach Head

Beach Head's mix-and-match approach somehow added up to something greater than the sum of its parts, and its celebrated naval bombardment section – as dive-bombers scream in from the distance while you blast away on an AA gun – was spectacular for its time.



Raid Over Moscow

Despite its daft premise, once out of the infamous hanger, *Raid* was a superior game to *Beach Head*. The *Zaxxon*-like flying sections and *Discs Of Tron*-inspired Reactor sub-game were particular highlights, along with dropping bits of the Kremlin onto unsuspecting tanks…



Beach Head II

Subtitled *The Dictator Strikes Back*, the sequel to the million-selling *Beach Head* is perhaps even better still. It particularly shines in two-player mode, from gunning down scores of your friend's miniature troops in the opening sequence to the climactic riverside knife fight.



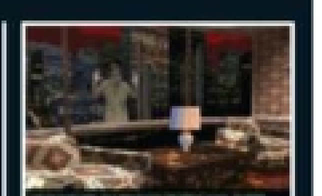
Leaderboard

Access played a masterstroke with *Leaderboard*, a golf game that was simple to play but highly rewarding, even for those not wild about the sport. Visually stunning for a C64 title, the fluid animation of the golfer, captured from Roger's golf swing, is a particular stand-out moment.



Links: The Challenge Of Golf

Links was a radical improvement over *Leaderboard*, thanks to a terrain-mapping feature with which Access could replicate any real-life course. The digitised animation and photo-realistic graphics also made it a showpiece game.



Under A Killing Moon

Tex Murphy came of age in this interactive adventure, which channels cinematic motifs from *Blade Runner* to Sam Spade. Combining 3D exploration and dialogue-based interrogations with a host of bizarre characters, it's a witty and suspenseful trip.



» [C64] In two-player mode, *Beach Head II*'s flying knife-fight was always a source of hilarity.

"We started by filming my swing against a brick wall with a VHS camera," remembers Roger. "The process was, project and trace the image frame by frame onto clear plastic then into the sprite system of the C64. It took me weeks. While I worked on that, Bruce wrote our first ball flight code. When we laid the golfer and ball flight on a static background, we were amazed how real it looked. In fact, I remember getting goose bumps. Bruce and I looked at each other and grinned. I'm not sure we even said anything. It was at that moment that *Leaderboard* was born!"

While Bruce's programming and mathematical elegance gave his own programs the edge, other Access projects showed similar innovation. Steve Witzel designed a miniature robot-building kit, The Robotic Workshop. It included a control unit that plugged into a C64 and was years ahead of its time. Brent Erickson created the 3D shooter *Echelon*, a project that was perhaps overly-ambitious for its initial platform.

"We had been developing 3D technology for *Leaderboard* and I wanted to do a game somewhat like *Battlezone* with what we had," says Brent. "After several iterations, *Echelon* emerged as a futuristic space combat game. *Echelon* was one of the first true 3D games for the C64 – I think the only other at the time was *Elite*. We needed to display objects and terrain at a large distance, so I came up with a technique that would allow us to project objects at distance and still have a fast update (well, relatively fast; I think we were at five fps). The other challenge was putting all the data together. This was all done by hand using large sheets of graph paper…"

One of *Echelon*'s most notable innovations was the Lipstik, a headset device that allowed players to 'communicate' with the game's navigational computer and fire weapons. "That was my idea," says Steve. "We added the headset because C64 software was starting to phase down and the IBM PC was starting to take hold. Market-share was dwindling and the Lipstik really sold a lot of units."



» Steve Witzel's Robotic Workshop offered users the chance to build and program robots, using Capsela components.

To counter the C64's marketplace slide, Access Software had begun converting its games to other platforms such as the Apple II and Atari 400/800 and ST, while US Gold had been busy porting *Beach Head*, *Raid Over Moscow* and others to the Spectrum and Amstrad CPC. *10th Frame*, *Echelon* and golfing spin-off *World Class Leaderboard* were the first batch of Access titles to receive PC conversions. The latter two releases included a technically remarkable system called RealSound that allowed primitive PCs to play digitised speech.

"RealSound was my only patent," says Steve Witzel. "This was in the days before sound cards – all I had was the speaker that just beeped and everyone said it was impossible. We ended up starting another company that licensed RealSound to forty countries for a bunch of applications." ▶

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Bruce Carver



Through his work creating some of Access Software's most famous titles, from *Beach Head* to *Links*, Bruce Carver gained a reputation as one of the industry's most prolifically talented designer-programmers. In 1997, *PC Gamer* awarded him the accolade of one of the 'Gods of Gaming'. He remained at the company he founded until 2003, before returning to the construction industry with his venture, Carver Homes. Bruce passed away suddenly from cancer on 28 December 2005. He was 57 years old.

Brent Erickson



Brent currently shares his time between managing application and firmware teams at audio technology specialist Harman, working on automotive simulations for racing enthusiasts (www.motionsoftware.com) and teaching programming at a Salt Lake City college. He also continues to dabble with game design, creating a drag-racing sim, *World Drag Racing*, for a local software business development contest in 2012.

Steve Witzel

Steve is still innovating, designing hardware and software systems to help hearing and sight impaired individuals and foreign speakers enjoy live theatre performances for a company called Sound Associates. Another of his recent projects is MyBlueBoost, a portable power source for charging iPhone, Blackberry and Android devices (www.smartgeekproducts.com).

Chris Jones



Chris will be familiar to a generation of gamers as the face of Tex Murphy, having played the character through all five titles in the series. He is currently working with screenwriter Aaron Conners on a new Kickstarter-funded *Tex Murphy* adventure, *Tesla Effect*, while stepping into the shoes of the fedora-donning detective yet again in the game's live action video sequences.

Roger Carver

Like Chris, Roger continues to be involved in Truegolf, the Access subsidiary that spun off from the company after the Microsoft buyout in 1999. The company produces large-screen 'Virtual Golf Simulators', building on technology and expertise gained through the design of the *Leaderboard* and *Links* product lines.

» [PC] *Echelon* was an ambitious 3D space shooter, with exploration and puzzle elements.





TIMELINE

1982 BRUCE CARVER CREATES SPRITEMASTER AND BEGINS SELLING IT IN STEVE WITZEL'S COMPUTER STORE. ACCESS SOFTWARE IS FORMED IN NOVEMBER THAT YEAR.

1983 ACCESS'S FIRST GAME, NEUTRAL ZONE, IS PUBLISHED, FOLLOWED BY BEACH HEAD WHICH PROVES A PHENOMENAL SUCCESS. US GOLD AGREES TO DISTRIBUTE FUTURE ACCESS PRODUCTS IN THE UK AND PARTS OF EUROPE.

1984 BRUCE CARVER ATTEMPTS TO RECREATE THE SUCCESSFUL BEACH HEAD FORMULA WITH THE CONTROVERSIAL COLD WAR-INSPIRED RAID OVER MOSCOW. OTHER ACCESS-PUBLISHED GAMES THAT YEAR ARE OLLIE'S FOLLIES AND THE SCROLLS OF ABADON. ROGER CARVER JOINS THE COMPANY.

1985 BEACH HEAD II: THE DICTATOR STRIKES BACK HITS STORES, ACCOMPANIED BY RAVE REVIEWS IN THE GAMING PRESS.

1986 BRUCE CARVER DESIGNS THE TEN-PIN BOWLING SIMULATION 10TH FRAME, PRIOR TO THE RELEASE OF THE HIGHLY ACCLAIMED LEADERBOARD LATER THAT YEAR.

1987 ECHELON AND WORLD CLASS LEADERBOARD ARE RELEASED AND BOTH GAMES ARE PORTED TO THE PC.

1989 TEX MURPHY MAKES HIS FIRST APPEARANCE IN MEAN STREETS.

1990 ACCESS PUBLISHES ITS FIRST VGA-ONLY TITLE LINKS: THE CHALLENGE OF GOLF.

1994 THE FIRST CD-ROM BASED TEX MURPHY ADVENTURE, UNDER A KILLING MOON, HITS THE SHELVES.

1998 THE LAST TEX MURPHY GAME, OVERSEER, IS PUBLISHED ON DVD-ROM.

1999 MICROSOFT BUYS ACCESS SOFTWARE AND IT IS INTEGRATED INTO THE MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS COLLECTIVE AS SALT LAKE GAMES STUDIO.

2003 MICROSOFT RENAMES THE STUDIO INDIE GAMES.

2004 TAKE-TWO INTERACTIVE PURCHASES THE STUDIO FROM MICROSOFT AND IT IS RENAMED INDIE BUILT.

2006 TAKE-TWO SHUTS DOWN INDIE BUILT, BRINGING JUST OVER 20 YEARS OF PIONEERING GAME DEVELOPMENT TO A CLOSE.

"In the early days, we worked out of Bruce's basement"
CHRIS JONES


» Margot Kidder and Chris Jones on the *Under A Killing Moon* set.


» [PC] Chris Jones as Tex Murphy in *Under A Killing Moon*

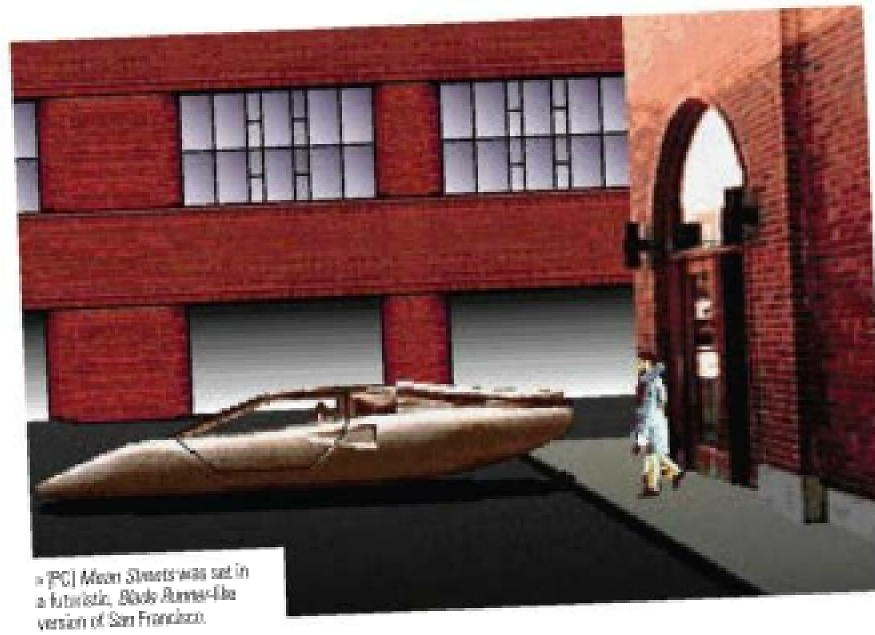
▶ Access's final C64 title, *Mean Streets*, was another ambitious offering that jumped to the PC platform. Using a modified version of the *Echelon* 3D engine, and featuring striking digitised graphics and speech courtesy of RealSound, it introduced an enigmatic new hero named Tex Murphy.

"We felt *Echelon* had done reasonably well for us as a product and we were looking for a way to expand the usage," explains Chris. "The idea we kicked around was having a purpose to the flight-sim. For example, we wanted the player to fly anywhere on the West Coast. This evolved into having a detective storyline behind it and that's how Tex Murphy came to be. While we started out trying to do a flight-sim, by the time the product went out it was more of an adventure."

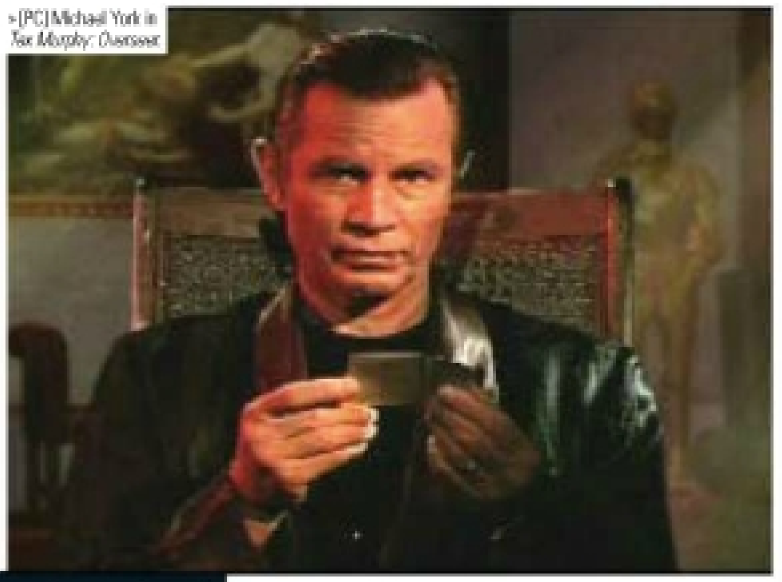
"*Mean Streets* was when Chris really took on a more creative role," says Brent. "It was right in line with his interests as a kid. He and Doug used to make movies as young kids and screen them for their family. In fact we made a movie at Access, *Plan 10 From Outer Space*, that had most of us taking on various acting roles…"

"We did a huge launch at the Academy Awards of Arts and Sciences building in Beverley Hills," remembers Steve. "We had a lot of Hollywood celebrities show up for that because we were billing it as an 'interactive movie' and they were all interested in where this computer thing was going." The fact that *Mean Streets*' cast of characters were digitised from real actors indeed gave it an impressive cinematic flavour, while Chris himself stepped into the role of Tex, one that he would reprise a further four times.

With years of experience working on the *Leaderboard* games, Access was about to take another brave step in the PC software market. "Bruce and I had a lot of conversations after *Leaderboard* came out," says Steve. "The C64 sales were sinking – everyone was moving to the PC – but Bruce was dragging his feet because it was 16 colours at the time. We had a long talk after a CES and I said 'Bruce, we need to come up with the first VGA-only game, and we need to tout it as VGA-only'." That game was *Links: The Challenge Of Golf*, the series debut of what would become the best selling PC golf franchise ever. At the time, most PC games also supported the older EGA mode, leading to a compromise in visual quality. Being tailored exclusively to the higher-end VGA graphics cards, Links was considerably better looking than any other golf game on the market. "We sold a lot of copies to people that wanted to show off their computers because it was just gorgeous," says Steve.


» [PC] *Mean Streets* was set in a futuristic, *Blade Runner*-like version of San Francisco.

"Bruce's goal was to get the terrain within two inches of what it was on the actual courses. I did get in trouble with him with one of the versions which had St Andrews. *Links* had this great terrain feature and I said 'why are you doing St Andrews? it's flat.' He really got mad about that… I guess it's like the Mecca of golf!" *Links* went on to become the flagship franchise for Access Software throughout the Nineties, with dozens of expansion packs and course add-ons being released.


» [PC] Michael York in *Tex Murphy: Overseer*

The *Tex Murphy* series continued with *Martian Memorandum*, which was followed by *Under A Killing Moon* and *The Pandora Directive*, both of which featured full 3D environments coupled with extensive live-action video sequences and Hollywood talent like Kevin McCarthy, Margot Kidder, and James Earl Jones. "Some of them were big names that had seen their day," reflects Steve. "Affordable but recognisable. Some of the actors were interesting. I went out to lunch with Brian Keith and he was like an oak – I thought the guy was going to die on us – but as soon as the camera turned on he just went for it…" The final game in the franchise, *Tex Murphy: Overseer*, a remake of the original *Mean Streets*, was released in 1998.

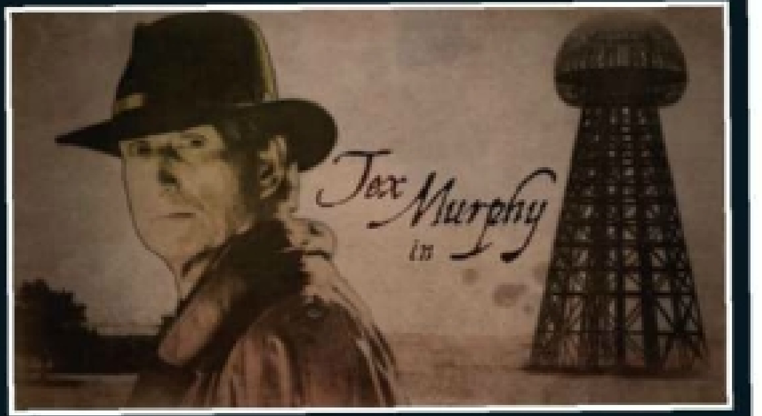
Although *Links* and *Tex* remained a principle source of income, Access began to consider another way of ensuring its survival. "We started investigating the option of going public," explains Steve, "but we'd seen a lot of companies doing something similar only to lose a ton of money and go out of business, so we were a little cautious. But Microsoft came to us before the launch of Windows and asked us to do their golf game, and that started a long relationship. It got to the point where we had to be on Windows only (and drop platforms like the Mac), so we said we'd differentiate between our game, *Links*, and their game, *Microsoft Golf*."

"That came to a head one day when USA Today reviewed both games and rated ours superior to Microsoft's. The games were virtually identical in performance, but our marketing was better which gained us more recognition in the press. Finally they said 'Look… we just want to buy the company.' And I think it was really the right time for Access because we didn't have the deep pockets to go after the likes of Tiger Woods, and we didn't have the marketing budget to be on multiple platforms. A lot of people thought that with Microsoft behind us we would really start to sell a lot."

The buyout was completed in 1999, with Access becoming a satellite of Microsoft Game Studios, but the hope of massive sales gains never materialised. Bruce Carver continued to work on the *Links* series, until leaving in 2003 to form the construction company, Carver Homes. In 2004, Microsoft sold the studio to Take-Two Interactive, which renamed the company Indie Built. Indie produced *Amped 2* and the tennis simulation *Top Spin 2* for the Xbox 360 before sadly closing in 2006.

Today, the Access legacy lives on in Truegolf – where Chris, Roger and other former employees still work – a subsidiary that escaped the Microsoft buyout and designs big-screen golf simulators for home and corporate use. In 2007, Chris Jones and Aaron Conners formed Big Finish Games and began the process of touting a possible sixth *Tex Murphy* adventure – with the working title *Project Fedora* – to publishers. On 6 June 2012 a Kickstarter campaign by Big Finish successfully raised funding for the new game, after $598,104 was pledged by backers, easily surpassing the company's $400,000 goal. And so began a whole new adventure for Chris and several other Access alumni. As this issue of **RG** went to press, Big Finish announced that the new game would be called *Tesla Effect*, and appears to be themed around aspects of the work of the famous Austrian physicist and inventor Nikola Tesla. It's been a long time coming, but the fedora will most definitely be back.

Thanks to Steve Witzel, Brent Erickson, Chris Jones, Roger Carver, Kurt Kalata and David Crookes for their assistance with this feature.



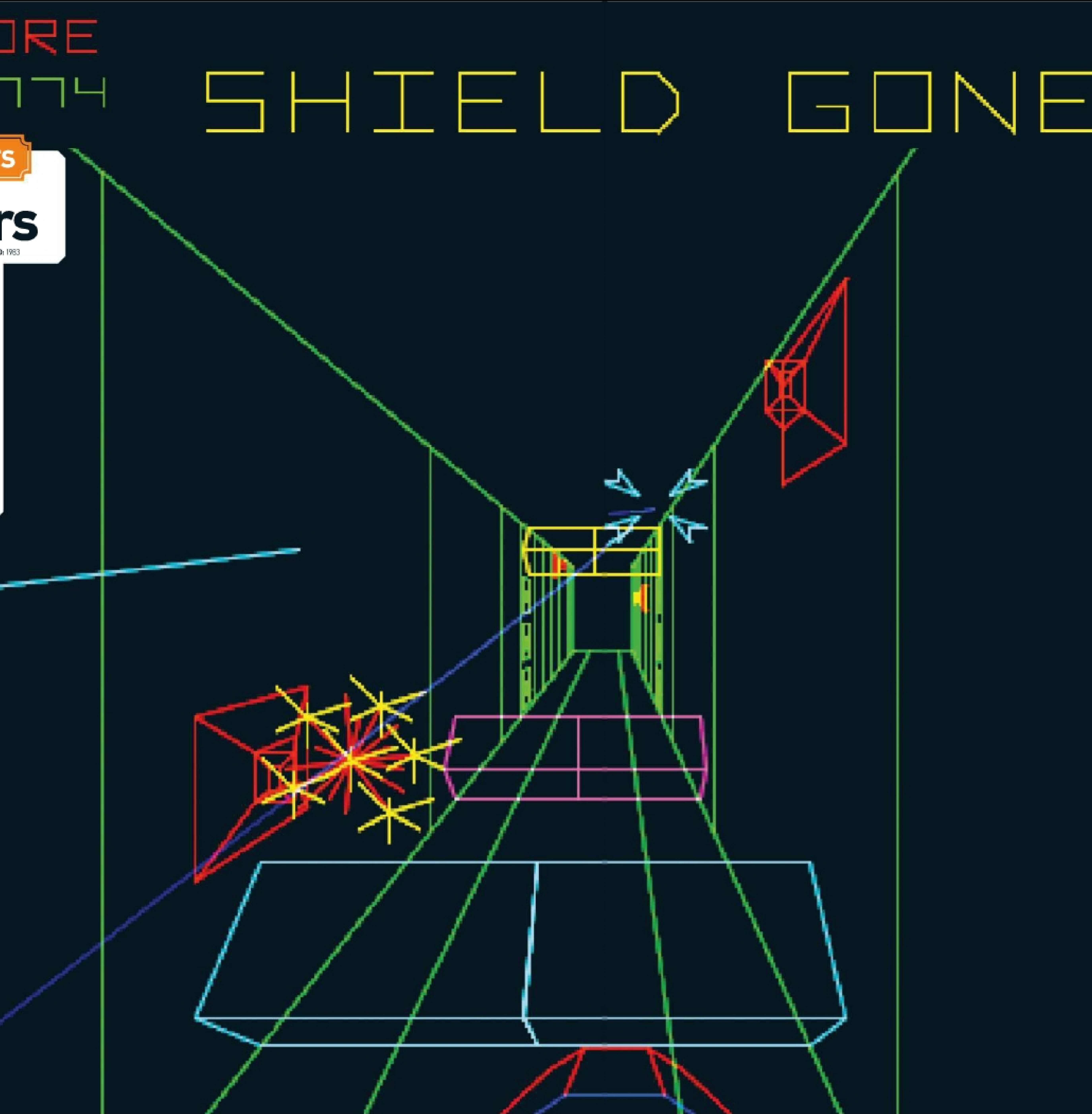
TESLA EFFECT: CHRIS JONES Q&A

Why did you decide that the time was right to revive Tex Murphy?
We had tried reviving Tex Murphy several times since the cliffhanger in *Overseer* in 1998. However, during that time adventure games had fallen out of favour for games that were more 'console-friendly'. Aaron Conners and I had approached several publishers since that time to bring Tex back, but no one was interested. When Double Fine had its great success with crowdfunding their adventure through Kickstarter, we knew we had to try this method to revive Tex. We have a hardcore following of Tex fans who have stuck with us over the years, and they were the ones made the Kickstarter campaign a success. We are very thankful to them for helping us achieve our dream of bringing Tex back.

Were you surprised at the reaction from fans over the Kickstarter project?
Frankly, we were gratified. It had been a long time since the last game and we weren't sure what sort of reception our Kickstarter campaign would receive. By the time *Overseer* debuted, not only had the popularity of adventure games diminished, but games that used FMV also suffered greatly in the mainstream gaming world. To have people excited for Tex to come back was a complete thrill for us.

What can we expect from the new game?
You're going to see very good performances by accomplished acting talent, a rich story on an epic scale and three different path experiences taking you through the game. It's not merely a matter of three different endings, but three different experiences that the player develops throughout the game. *Tesla Effect*'s story is funny, scary, compelling and, because a player gets varied information on each path, the game offers hours of re-playability.





CLASSIC MOMENTS

Star Wars

» **PLATFORM:** ARCADE » **DEVELOPER:** ATARI INC » **RELEASED:** 1983

It took Atari ten years to recreate the classic Death Star trench run, but by goodness was it worth the wait. Thanks to the success of *Return Of The Jedi*, which was on worldwide cinema release, gamers eagerly lapped up the chance to participate in the original film's grand finale. The first time you made your way through the trench was relatively straightforward, as you only had to deal with gun emplacements and the odd fireball. Things got much trickier on later runs however, with massive barriers that would force you to duck and weave as you desperately tried to keep hold of your precious shields. Later games may have been more realistic (particularly *Star Wars Rogue Squadron II: Rogue Leader* on the GameCube), but the original wire-frame run remains our favourite.

BIO

Atari Inc's *Star Wars* had everything you wanted from a hit arcade game. It had stunning wire-frame visuals, excellent controls and an amazingly frantic pace. Best of all though, it was based on one of the best science fiction films of all time, effortlessly capturing the thrills and spills of *Star Wars*'s epic space battles. Needless to say, gamers flocked to it, eager to experience the thrilling trench run and get the opportunity to mow down scores of TIE Fighters. It remains one of the best games based on the licence. High praise indeed, considering how many *Star Wars* games there are.

MORE CLASSIC STAR WARS MOMENTS

"That's no moon, it's a space station"



While the Death Star trench run is one of the best moments in *Star Wars*, blowing up the actual Death Star comes a close second. While you don't have to worry about being chased by Darth Vader, you do have to take out the Death Star's exhaust port. Miss it and you'll have to retrace your original run. Hit it, however, and you're pulled back from the Death Star in dramatic fashion. Once you're a safe distance away, it explodes.

"Don't get cocky!"



One of the best parts of *Star Wars* is facing off against TIE Fighters. The wire-framed ships are exceedingly nippy and, while the first waves are simple to stop, they get harder and harder to shoot down as the game progresses. You'll stick with it though, as the satisfaction you get from shooting them down is immense. You'll even get a crack at Darth Vader's ship, but unfortunately it can't be destroyed.

"May the force be with you"



Shooting down TIE Fighters is all well and good, but if you want to be really cool you might want to take down the actual fireballs that they fling at you. Fireballs pop up throughout the game and become increasingly prevalent on later trench runs. You'll need amazing reflexes to take them down, and as they increase in number you'll find your work even more cut out. A great way to show off your skills when playing in the arcades.

"Use the force Luke"



One of the neatest moments from *Star Wars* is nothing more than a hardware trick. On later stages, before you approach the actual trench, you'll find yourself in large open areas shooting down red blocks or tall yellow towers, both of which spawn countless fireballs. This continues for a fair amount of time until the horizon starts spinning and rotating into the actual Death Star trench.



With a remake on the way, David Crookes talks to Lorne Lanning about the impact of Abe's Oddysee and the rest of a series that just fell short of its planned quintology

A character who can break wind is always a winner. Even if that character is an alien with bulbous, bloodshot eyes, a high ponytail of hair made from feathers and a skinny, almost malnourished torso; the ability to let one go, while undoubtedly disgusting, is yet all too endearing to ignore.

It may not be a tool employed by many other gaming characters, but perhaps Sonic, Mario and even Lara could give it a go. Then again, they have not quite endured the life of Abe, star of the *Oddworld* games, whose backstory would make noises emit from all but the toughest of bottoms.

Abe's days are spent scrubbing floors and suffering heartless beatings from Sligs, the backbone of a repressive society's industrial security team. Things take a rather sinister turn when Abe accidentally discovers that he and his fellow Mudokon workers are not merely slaves, but fodder for the machines used at the vast Rupture Farms food processing plant where they toil each day.

Lucky then that Abe emerges as the 'chosen one' and is able to pursue the ousting of dictator Mulluck the Glukkon and his evil regime, thereby freeing the downtrodden from their horrific plight.

Today, such determination to stick one to 'The Man' and spark an uprising would undoubtedly involve Twitter. Technology-free Abe treads a rather more conventional path, stomping around on foot, meeting other slaves in person and cheerily urging them to "follow me" – but not too closely, you would hope.

"From a story perspective, all of the *Oddworld* stories were inspired from the dirty deeds of the dark side of globalisation," explains Lorne Lanning, who co-founded American developer Oddworld Inhabitants with fellow special effects and computer animation expert Sherry McKenna. "And it was the stories that convinced Sherry to get involved and do this whole thing with me."

Work began on the plot in January 1995. "We took big inspiration from *Flashback*, *Out Of This World* and *Myst*, and it worked well," Lorne continues. "We started to create an intriguing world." Ideas were bounced off designer Paul O'Connor and the crew to work out what would work and what could be altered should production hit any issues.

Originally, the idea was to call the game *SoulStorm*, but other games at the time had the word 'Soul' in them so a new moniker was found to avoid confusion. There were also initial thoughts over making the game 3D, but this was scrapped in favour of 2D, even though the advent of the 32-bit consoles showed a market going the other way.

The game drew on the gaming styles of old – right down to an 8-bit flick-screen mechanic – and that was due to Lorne's belief that there was still mileage left in 2D gaming. Lorne had also been working with 3D for the previous decade and didn't believe the crop of 3D games on the PlayStation were outstanding enough to prompt a switch.

Still, the assets were built in 3D. The bitmaps for the game were pre-rendered and this, in a sense, produced rich 2.5D with image depth and detail. "We didn't want to launch 'low poly world' to establish the first impression of the *Oddworld* Universe," Lorne says, revealing that the plan to build a five-part story – *The Oddworld Quintology* – was foremost in his mind.

As well as beautiful visuals and slick cut-scenes that blended into the gameplay, a major part of *Oddworld* was the feature Gamespeak. It allowed Abe to talk, whistle and, yes, fart, and it was crucial for gameplay and for humour. Seldom failing to raise a smile, it was seen as so important that it was included in the demo Lorne hawked around to publishers to whip up interest and investment in the game.

The debut title also had an artificial intelligence routine called Aware Lifeforms In Virtual Environments (or ALIVE for short). This controlled the actions of the game's creatures according to the situation they were faced with and the type of character they were. Abe could therefore decide to solve some puzzles and ignore others, and the player could even trick Sligs into shooting each other.

Abe could also chant and possess other characters, using them to solve puzzles or carry out a killing. Although Lorne wanted shooting in the game he didn't want Abe to have a twitchy trigger finger himself, and this was a way around such a situation (keen watchers will also note, incidentally, that Abe had four fingers in the debut game but only three thereafter – this was to avoid causing offence in Japan where four-fingered characters are banned out of respect for meat-packing workers who often lost fingers in work-related accidents). *Abe's Oddysee* progressed well and was earmarked for a PlayStation and PC release. ▶



» It's not all about noise, Abe's expressions show emotion and struggle.



» Lorne Lanning is the driving force behind *Oddworld*.

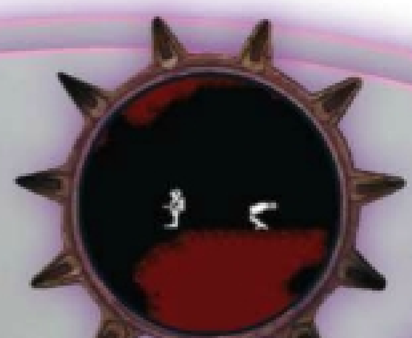


» [PlayStation] Abe will often have to use others to help him.



ODD WORLDS

We examine other games set in bizarre universes



FANTASTIC VOYAGE 1982

■ Zooming through the body of a brain-damaged scientist, this game was inspired by the Sixties movie of the same name. Items of note included a lung, yellow cholesterol and other such inside-of-body organs and happenings.



ANT ATTACK 1983

■ The walled city of Antescher was inhabited by giant ants which would be annihilated by lobbing grenades. Gamers could play as a man or woman and try and rescue hostages. A B-movie of a game.



ANOTHER WORLD 1991

■ Young scientist Lester explores a treacherous alien world with dangerous indigenous animals and humanoid creatures. Cinematic, and with use of the rotoscoping animation technique, players loved the enormous fictional universe.





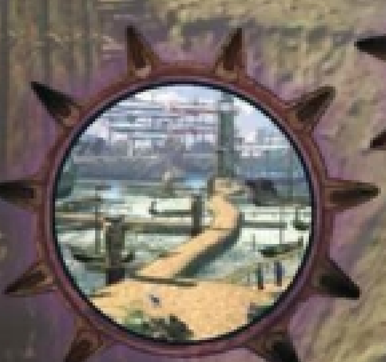
BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL 1992

■ Talking pigs? Tick. Or rather, raise eyebrows. A commercial failure it may have been, but the planet Hyllis was under siege and freelance hack Jade was just the sort to go head-to-head with the alien race, Domz.



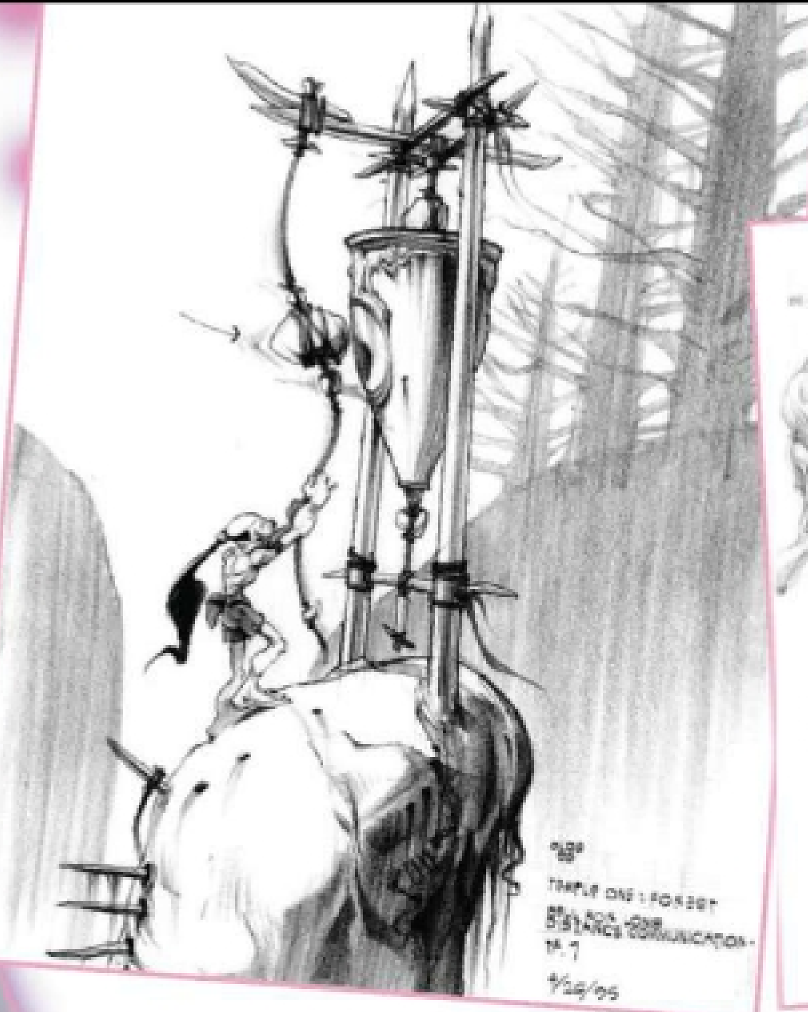
HEART OF DARKNESS 1998

■ The Darklands was a foreboding place with winged shadow creatures and monsters. Controlled by the Master of Darkness, you didn't always want to avoid death given the deliciously explicit meet-the-maker scenes you'd witness.



THE LONGEST JOURNEY 1999

■ Set in a parallel universe, this point-and-click adventure game saw April Ryan shifting between Arcadia and Industrial Stark and all of the various hazards that were present in each of them.



» Early artwork – this from 26 April 1995 – shows the thinking behind the strange nature of the world Abe inhabits.





▶ *Abe's Oddysee* was a huge success and it sold well in the lead up to Christmas, prompting a Game Boy version called *Oddworld Adventures* to be released in 1998. If there was a complaint, it was the lack of a quick-save facility – "It was maddening that we delivered without getting it in the first time," muses Lorne. "Chalk it up to lessons learned." – but the team made sure it was implemented in the sequel.

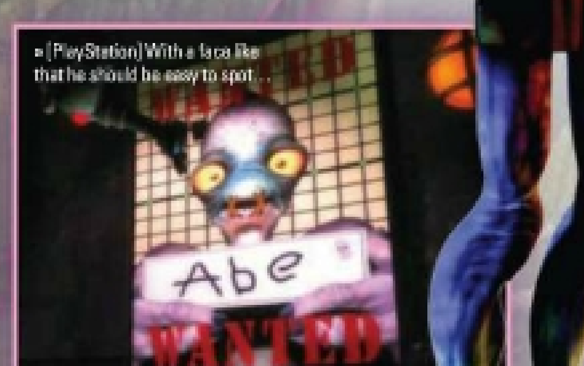
"We had just nine months to release *Abe's Exoddus* for Christmas following *Oddysee's* release," recalls Lorne. "It was a super crunch all the way through the entire development, and this was less than half the time that *Abe's Oddysee* took us to develop. But it was more complicated as we also believed we needed 'twice the game' in sheer poundage."

The second game in the series, which was released in November 1998, picked up where the debut game left off. Abe had become a celebrity but was told that the Glukkons, a leading, ruthless, capitalist, industrial race with a disregard for worker rights, was grabbing blind Mudokons and enslaving them to excavate a Mudokon burial site. With a poison being created from the bones of the dead, Abe had to find a cure for the illness and prevent the creation of SoulStorm's brew.

This time out, the characters became more emotionally engaging and the pace picked up. Gamespeak instructions were used to command multiple Mudokons at the same time, and Mudokons found it harder to follow Abe because many of them were blind. For Lanning, it was about giving the game a further level of polish, depth and challenge.

"Our approach to the game was pretty much compatible with how you would approach a film," says Lorne. "With both you start with a script, but we then used an additional layer of game mechanics that we knew we wanted to implement or evolve upon.

"So starting with these two key high-level components we worked them up simultaneously. We integrated the script tightly against the ramping of mechanics in gameplay. Our target was continually working to try to find a tighter fusion of narrative that was not only engaging as a story, but was also informative and foreshadowing of new play mechanics that would be coming up next for the gamer."



» [PlayStation] With a face like that he should be easy to spot…



» [PlayStation] You'll often move to the background during play.



The first game had a heads-up display, but this was dropped for the sequel. "It was a goal of mine to try to eliminate any menu elements that broke the reality horizon," Lorne explains. "Floating GUI elements reinforce for you 'this is a game' and for the original *Abe* games we wanted to get away from that impression and instead try to instil the sensation of the player being responsible for these people living in this world."

In trying to remove all traces of the traditional heads-up display, Oddworld Inhabitants attempted to find more clever, subtle methods of communicating necessary information, and tried to do it in more logical ways so that it felt more like a film. "We wanted the elements to feel like they were within the world rather than a HUD layered over the world," Lorne continues. "It was attempting to accomplish a deeper impression of a 'living creature adventure', rather than just a 'gaming adventure'."

The emotions helped bring the creatures to life. "The second game had more entertainment value as well as a stronger emotional relationship to these silly little characters," says Lorne. "We always want you to laugh when you're playing our games, regardless of how dark their subject matter is."

And dark is a good description. Much of that is down to Lorne himself. He is a deep thinker who, with the *Oddworld* series of games, was aiming to craft a gameplay and story experience that drew on a sense of injustice. Festering in the back of Lorne's mind was a concern for disturbing human rights abuses by powerful corporations from the shipping docks of Bangladesh to the diamond or gold mines in South America and South Africa. He wanted *Oddworld* to have a dark premise but follow the lead set by *The Simpsons* and *The Daily Show*, both of which refrain from getting up on a soap box. Like them, he did not want to lose sight of *Oddworld* as entertainment and believed that humour and narrative would combine to raise important issues.

He denies that the series is political. "Personally, I think politics is for chumps," he says. "It's for suckers who still believe they have people fighting for their interests in the greater halls of power and often willingly refuse to see that their would be heroes have been completely compromised." But he talks of an "insane elite class of globalists actively ruining the planet for the rest of us and for their own short-term power gains".

"It was always these practises that inspired the content of *Oddworld*, as these stories started taking shape 20 years ago," Lorne ▶

» [PlayStation] Cut-scenes did a great job of conveying Abe's weird personality.



» [PlayStation] Abe's world is seriously oppressive. Poor Abe.

ODD ADVENTURES

Your guide to Abe and co's numerous retail releases



ABE'S ODDYSEE

DEVELOPER: ODDWORLD INHABITANTS
PUBLISHER: GT INTERACTIVE
PLATFORMS: PLAYSTATION, WINDOWS
YEAR: 1997



ABE'S EXODDUS

DEVELOPER: ODDWORLD INHABITANTS
PUBLISHER: GT INTERACTIVE
PLATFORMS: PLAYSTATION, WINDOWS
YEAR: 1998



ODDWORLD ADVENTURES

DEVELOPER: SAFFIRE
PUBLISHER: SAFFIRE
PLATFORM: GAME BOY
YEAR: 1998



ODDWORLD ADVENTURES 2

DEVELOPER: SAFFIRE
PUBLISHER: SAFFIRE
PLATFORM: GAME BOY COLOR
YEAR: 2000



MUNCH'S ODDYSEE

DEVELOPER: ODDWORLD INHABITANTS
PUBLISHER: MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS
PLATFORM: XBOX
YEAR: 2001



MUNCH'S ODDYSEE

DEVELOPER: ART CO
PUBLISHER: THQ INC
PLATFORM: GAME BOY ADVANCE
YEAR: 2001



STRANGER'S WRATH

DEVELOPER: ODDWORLD INHABITANTS
PUBLISHER: ELECTRONIC ARTS
PLATFORM: XBOX
YEAR: 2005



[PC] *Munch's Oddysee* was Abe's first proper 3D adventure.



[PC] Munch was the main protagonist of the third game.

continues. "So for me, I look deep into the darkest practises of the kleptoclass in a constant search of vehicles to inspire fiction from these practises in an effort to transform that darkness into a launch point for some seriously relevant and deeply ironic modern myth humour."

Lorne's outlook had an effect on the types of enemies in the game that were always designed around how they would play. The Glukkons were inspired by the kleptoclass. "Big shots bossing people around while ultimately being pretty useless parasites. Like bankers," he says. New enemies were also introduced including Flying Sligs, Slugs, Mine Cars and Greeters. "They were all first designed as challenges within our code reach, then we interpreted the mechanics into themed characters," Lorne says.

Following yet further acclaim, Lorne and his team pushed on with the third of the planned five games. The loyalty to PlayStation had gone and *Munch's Oddysee* was being slated for an exclusive November 2001 release on the Xbox.

As with the other games, there were two endings. "We did this because we always wanted empathy to be a major factor in the game, but if you played the game without empathy, we wanted you to get an ending that reflected your personal character," says Lorne. "If you went through our journey as a heartless douche, we wanted to remind you what a schmuck you were being and how it would ruin the fate of those you were supposed to be helping."

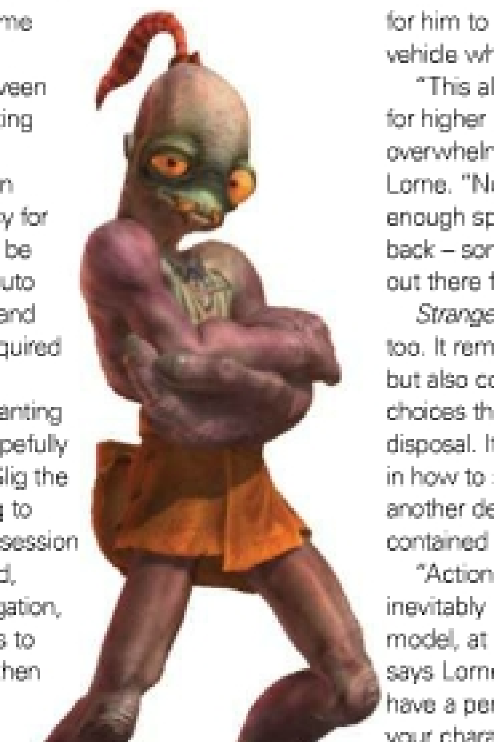
But this instalment was the first time *Oddworld* was rendered in three dimensions. "At the time, everyone was enamoured with 3D and the gaming press was speaking of 3D as the only viable way," Lorne recalls. "It was sad to see all the genres being left behind because they weren't using new chipsets. Regardless, if you wanted to keep getting funded, you needed to stay with the chipsets and where the audience interests were heading, and by the time we got to the Xbox it was all about 3D otherwise you probably weren't getting funded."

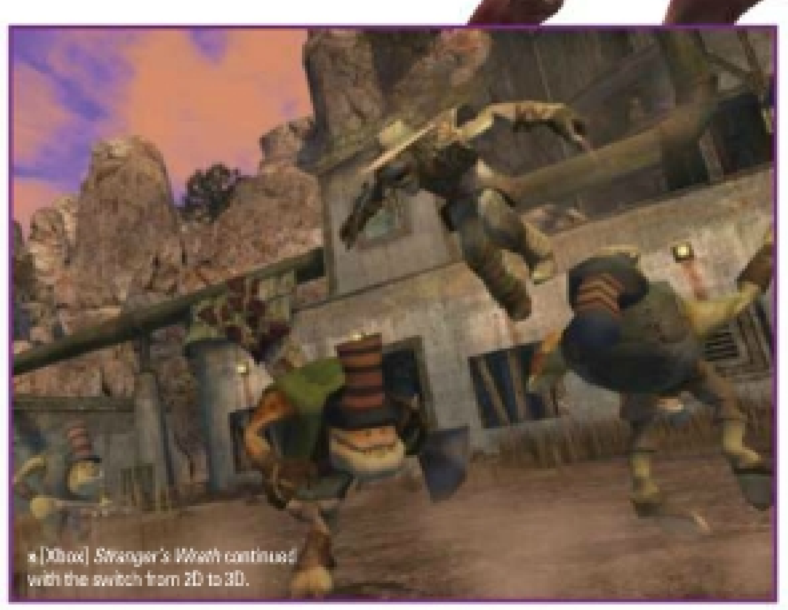
The added dimension was a challenge to capture what made Abe special in his awkwardness and abilities, yet have that embedded in a free roaming space. There was also a huge real-time 3D learning curve that all of the team was going through. But they made the most of the situation and, with players not only playing Abe but Munch too, the game could enter fresh waters.

> "We always wanted empathy to be a major factor in the game"
> Lorne Lanning

"We needed the ability to swap between characters while also dealing with targeting in possession," says Lorne. "In the *Abe* games, they were 2D and so possession was proximity auto-targeting. It was easy for the user to understand who they would be possessing. Once we entered 3D, the auto nature of it needed to change as depth and dimension added new dynamics and required new accuracies to offer the player."

He said it was a case of the player wanting to possess "that Slig over there, not; hopefully that one over there but we'll see what Slig the game chooses for us. That wasn't going to work," he explains, "so we needed possession to be targetable and, being in a 3D world, targeting was as easy as character navigation, so we used the same navigation abilities to control your possession orb. You could then navigate to nail your target."





[Xbox] *Stranger's Wrath* continued with the switch from 2D to 3D.

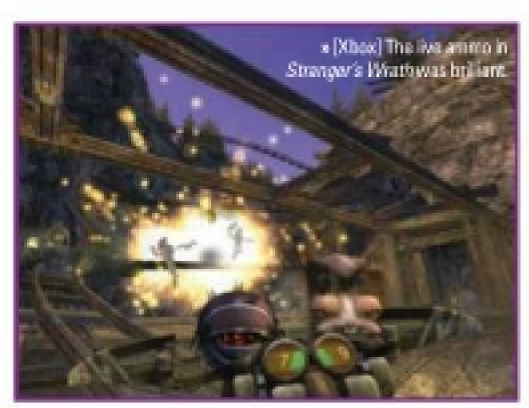
The reviews were not as favourable for *Munch's Oddysee*, with some believing the puzzles lacked variation. Lorne has no complaints. "I always felt all of our puzzles were not varied enough, but these are challenges with puzzle games and the amount of code we were writing for each puzzle," he confesses. "Puzzle games are not very economical with code. Combine that with development environments that were unpredictable in terms of budgeting, and you found yourself in tight spots making lots of compromises."

The fourth game, *Stranger's Wrath*, however, was a superb return to form. Released in January 2005 in America, it was critically acclaimed. It had first and third-person perspectives and was also faster. The team wanted speed to be a factor in the third-person in particular, due to the character's nature and ability to run faster. Stranger could become a ramming melee fighter at higher speeds and, by increasing in speed, his motion ability morphed into a motorcycle mode. He didn't, as Lorne explains, "pivot on a dime with speed". He steered and leaned into turns and it allowed for him to run much faster and feel more like a vehicle when controlled.

"This allowed us to have more 'retreat for higher ground' ability if you were getting overwhelmed in a combat situation," says Lorne. "Now you could retreat, and with enough speed to get past getting shot in the back – something I felt was very much missing out there for character-driven combat games."

Stranger's Wrath had an element of stealth, too. It remained true to the character's nature but also compounded the chemistry of choices that players were able to have at their disposal. It offered the gamer more choices in how to solve any combat situation. But another decision was made: *Stranger's Wrath* contained role-playing elements.

"Action-adventure games seemed inevitably heading toward a role-playing model, at least at an accounting level," says Lorne. "If the game was going to have a persistent economy, and one that your character needed to pursue in the narrative, then it needed to incorporate more modification and purchasability for the main character. Having this inherent in a system gives you many more things that you can make the gamer do for various reasons at various times, all of which are added tools available to the designers that help overall ramping while helping to decrease a potential monotony that can come with a game."



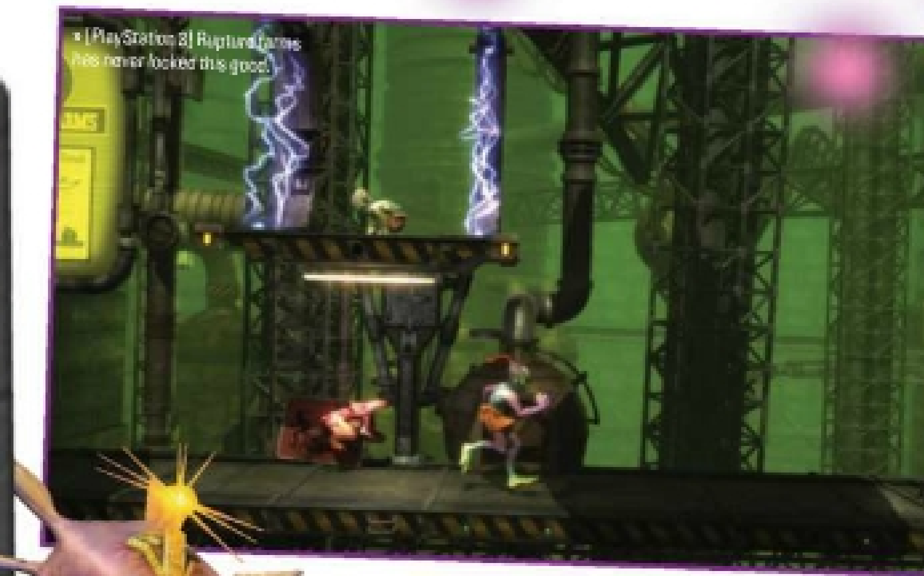
[Xbox] The live ammo in *Stranger's Wrath* was brilliant.

The fourth game became the last *Oddworld* title and the fifth game did not appear, cutting short the original quintology. *Stranger's Wrath* had been published by Electronic Arts and, while Lorne doesn't go too deep, he says, "Our experience working with the last publisher pretty much annihilated any desire we might have had left in continuing to work with big publishers," which points to a potential issue.

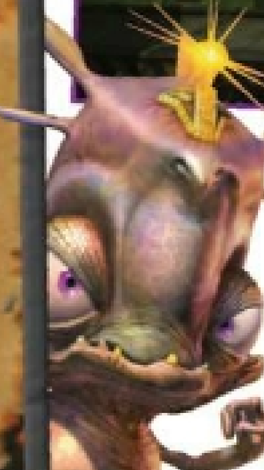
Plans for other games came and went. Names such as *Oddworld: The Hand Of Odd*, *SligStorm*, *The Brutal Ballad Of Fangus Klot*, *Oddworld: Squeek's Oddysee*, *Oddworld: Munch's Exoddus* and *Oddworld: Slave Circus* were put forward over the years. And while a game may well have surfaced around 2008, the Western financial crisis and work on a new project called *Citizen Siege* caused a distraction.

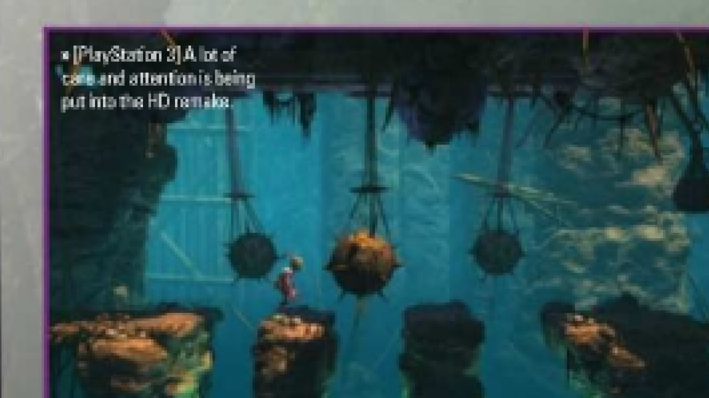
Remakes and digital content appear to be the way forward for now, and the *Oddworld* franchise is being built organically and without financing. But it means that the team cannot spend in the way it did, and it will take a while before triple-A contemporary content is released. "We've talked about a number of games but that was probably a mistake," says Lorne. "It's something I won't be doing until I know they are paid for."

It seems the appetite is still there, however. "We're very grateful for the way things have worked out but, like a lot of artists, we're always wanting to do better," he says, and we pray to hear Abe's farts in a new game sooner rather than later.



[PlayStation 3] Rupture Farms has never looked this good.





[PlayStation 3] A lot of care and attention is being put into the HD remake.

THE NEW KEEPER OF ODDWORLD

Five years after Stranger's Wrath, the series was given a dust down by developer Just Add Water. We talk to founder and CEO Stewart Gilray about the HD remakes



You began working on the *Oddworld* franchise in May 2010. Were you a fan of the series and how did you get involved?

I'd met Lorne briefly at GDC 2009. He was one of my industry icon legends and someone I'd always wanted to meet. Over the years I'd been asking a mutual friend to persuade Lorne to go back to doing a 2D-type game but with 3D assets – a remake of *Abe's Oddysee* or a game of a similar nature – but in June 2009, Lorne and I started exchanging emails. We spent the next nine months talking about various things and then he asked if Just Add Water could help them out as they'd been let down by another developer. He wanted us to look at *Stranger's Wrath* for the PC and I said yes, as long as we could do a PS3 version. We began to work on *Stranger HD* for PS3 in late September 2009 while still working on the initial PC release of *Stranger*, which was a straight port from Xbox.

By the time of your involvement, the series had been stagnant for four years. Were there discussions about moving the series on?

There were no real discussions. It was a case of 'let's do this project, and see where it leads to', and we've now released the initial PC release of *Stranger's Wrath*, three versions of *Stranger's Wrath HD*, two versions of *Munch's Oddysee HD* and we're working on the multi-platform remake of *Abe's Oddysee*, *Oddworld: New 'N' Tasty*. We only had two staff when we began the initial version but we have 16 now. The plan is we will continue and work on some proper new projects. We're going through a re-structure at the moment that will help that become a reality.

There were promises of *SligStorm*, *Fangus Klot*, *Squeek's Oddysee* and some other games. What was happening and why were these games not getting off the ground?

When the original studio was closed in April 2005, it was because Lorne and Sherry McKenna had decided enough was enough working with publishers. The primary reason was the difficulty of working on a triple-A title with budgets north of $15m, especially if you're only seeing a small return rate due to publisher/developer agreements the way they were back then. *Fangus Klot* was in development when that happened, so that was the main victim of what happened then. Lorne had been working on the story and design for *Squeek's Oddysee* as well, but couldn't solve a problem he had with it so it kept getting put on the back burner until that thing was solved. And *SligStorm* just didn't happen mainly due to working on *Munch's Oddysee*.

What makes *Oddworld* such a special series of games?

This is pretty easy actually: character, story, the world, craziness but most importantly the humour.

Is there still a place for 2D gaming in the modern era?

Why not? I think both pure 2D art and 3D art with 2D gameplay can still work very well, and we're showing that with *Oddworld: New 'N' Tasty*. I think this need for everything to be in 3D isn't always the right thing to do; there are better solutions if the design requires it.



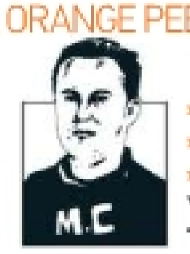
[PlayStation 3] New 'N' Tasty is looking very slick.



The Young Ones

"NEIL, NEIL, ORANGE PEEL"

RETROREVIVAL »



» Spectrum
» Orpheus
» 1986

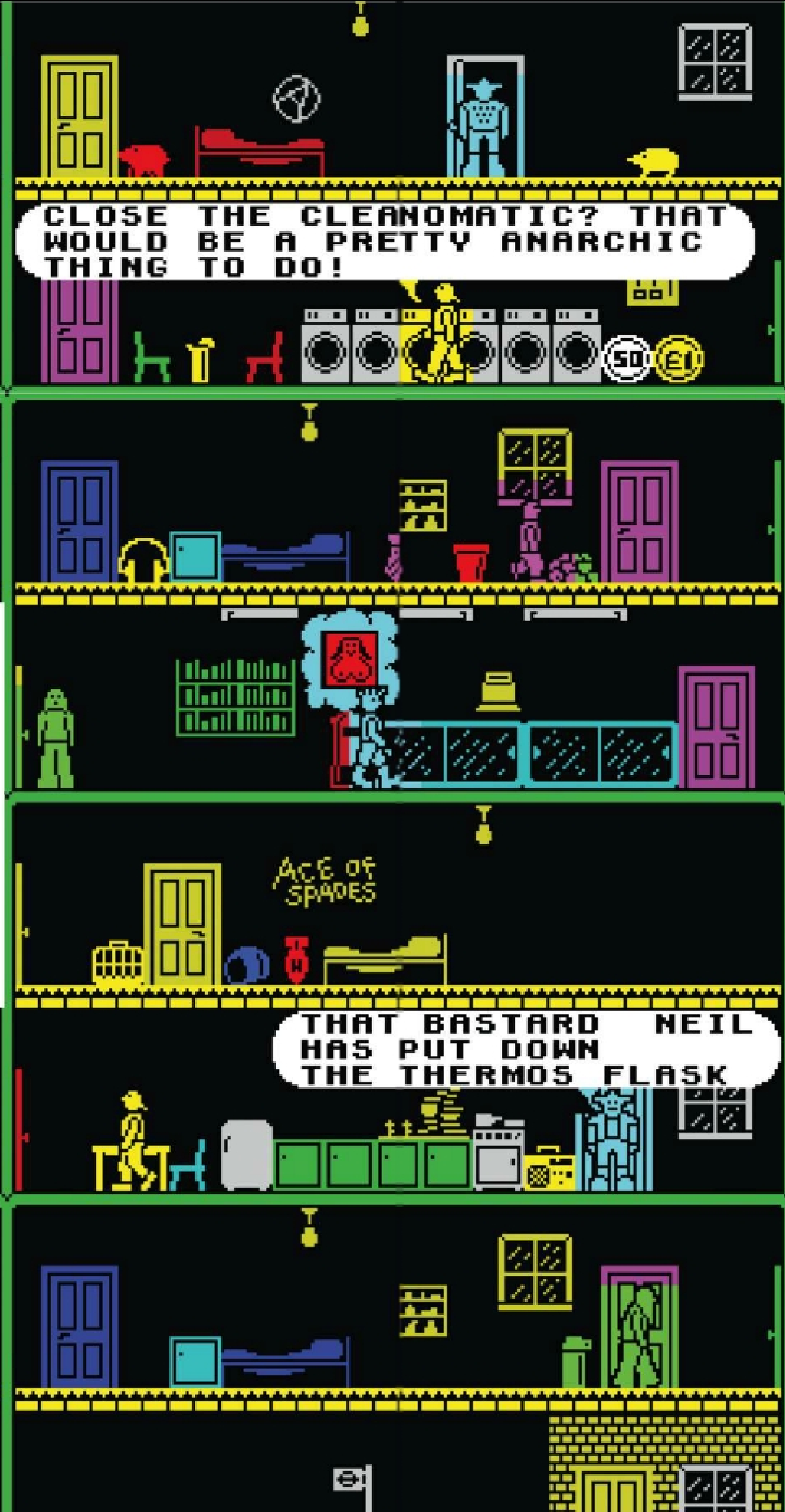
You have to wonder how a TV show as anarchic, surreal and hilarious as *The Young Ones* could possibly result in a game so dull, ordinary and boring. Orpheus Software somehow managed it.

Choosing to play as Vyvyan, Rick, Neil or Mike, you trudge around their student digs trying to gather up your possessions. Or something. I'm not quite sure, as it's never made entirely clear. Speech bubbles display quotes that are neither helpful nor funny. It's completely moronic but, unlike the TV series, not in a good way.

Just how did this mess get approved? Approval was actually a large part of the problem, according to Paul Kaufman, managing director of Orpheus Software. "We managed to negotiate *The Young Ones* license, beating bigger competitors such as Virgin Games," he once told me. "However, this was a disaster for the company. Each stage of the game had to be personally approved by the owners – Rik Mayall, Ben Elton and their management company – and it was almost impossible to get them all in the same place at the same time. We had advance orders for more than 10,000 copies from WHSmith and Boots, but due to the delays in getting the final master approved in time for Christmas, we missed the deadline."

This terrible setback, coupled with the collapse of Oric Computers (Orpheus was spun off from Oric's first-party publisher Tansoft), pretty much killed the company outright. *The Young Ones* videogame: deadlier than Vyvyan's phantom pregnancy. ✱







Future Classic

Modern games you'll still be playing in years to come



INFO

- » **Featured System:** PS3
- » **Year:** 2010
- » **Publisher:** Rockstar Games
- » **Developer:** Rockstar San Diego
- » **Key People:** Dan Houser (writer), Daren Bader (art director), Rob Wiethoff (voice of John Marston)

GO DEEPER

- » **Rockstar's next game, *LA Noire*, featured John Marston's hat inside a bin in the city.**
- » **The original *Red Dead Revolver* was initially going to be published by Capcom until Rockstar picked it up.**



» [PS3] Like *GTA*, Rockstar's characters in *Red Dead* are fast talkers, with sharply-scripted back-and-forths.

37.

RED DEAD REDEMPTION

Rockstar Games managed to craft the greatest of open worlds, as well a mature and accomplished narrative that reignited the unfashionable Western genre

THE BACKGROUND

The most publicly notable part of *Red Dead Redemption*'s journey to completion is the fact it was announced in a largely different form alongside the PS3's messy unveiling during E3 2005. It was informally referred to as a sequel to 2004's *Red Dead Revolver*, some aspects of which made it into the far more ambitious sequel, notably the Dead Eye slow-motion combat mechanic.

The goal was to capture the essence of Westerns on a pure wish fulfilment level, creating an open world backdrop that could enable every archetypal experience that a fan of that genre could ask for. Part pastiche and part expansion of Rockstar's existing sensibilities with creating open worlds – the latter skill honed by the preceding title *GTA IV* – the New York Times claimed that *Red Dead Redemption* cost almost $100 million to make, an investment that vastly outstripped most of Rockstar's industry contemporaries at the time.

It was a gigantic risk, really, considering that the Western had more or less remained dormant within videogames (and the wider cultural landscape) for many years – the original *Red Dead Revolver* only sold 3 million copies. No small number, of course, but a follow-up of *Red Dead*'s scale had to do a lot better to justify that size of investment. It did. With 13 million copies sold, *Red Dead* asserted Rockstar's dominance of the open world genre beyond *GTA*.

THE GAME

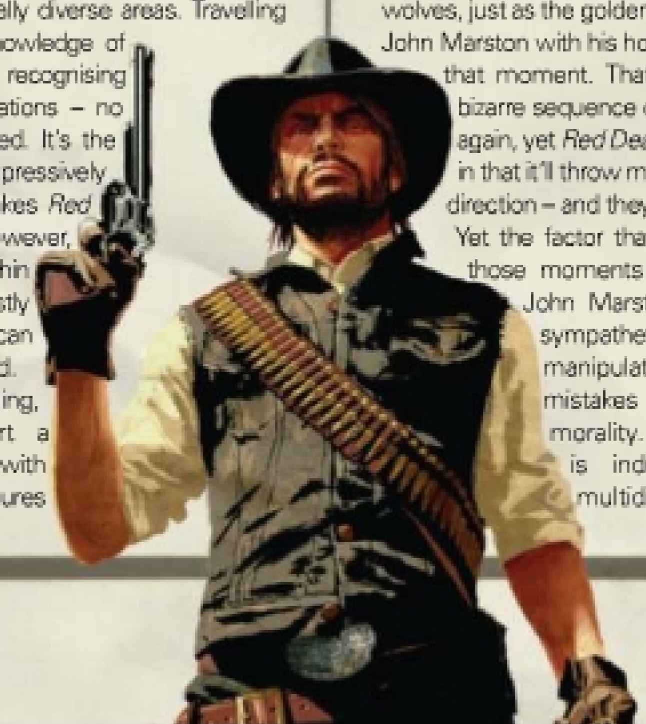
A great open world has an effect on the player beyond spectacle and size. To consume hours of your time while you explore with no goal, enjoying the sunsets, creating gameplay moments of your own across snowy mountains and wildlife-populated deserts, *Red Dead Redemption*'s sandbox was simply years ahead of its competitors. While Rockstar's output is contentious among some as to whether the publisher's games deserve such extraordinary levels of praise, its ambition with *Red Dead* to create an open world that permits every kind of Wild West fantasy goes far beyond what even its own *GTA* series had previously accomplished.

Here, we have a gigantic world with its own ecosystem, random events and RPG-infused depth to unravel. John Marston's story is technically set on the American/Mexican border, yet it compresses elements of the wider American wilderness into one massive summary of its most visually diverse areas. Travelling across the world, your knowledge of each region is formed by recognising landmarks and rock formations – no stretch of land feels wasted. It's the interactivity with this impressively constructed locale that makes *Red Dead* so compelling, however, and ahead of its time within a genre that is still mostly restrained in the way you can affect the surrounding world.

Being able to hunt anything, board every train, start a shootout in saloons, duel with strangers, anger wild creatures and lasso any NPC gives you constant impetus to remain in this world, to play with the possibilities outside of the story missions. This is balanced by a smart morality system that declares you an outlaw or champion based on your actions – consequences, to bring weight to the chaos.

The environment feels handcrafted, rather than big for the sake of it. Let's say you're out in the middle of a desert and you've narrowly survived an encounter with wolves, just as the golden sun sets behind a wounded John Marston with his horse in the distance; you own that moment. That set of circumstances and bizarre sequence of events may never happen again, yet *Red Dead Redemption* is astonishing in that it'll throw many more as dramatic in your direction – and they will all belong to you, too.

Yet the factor that underlines the success of those moments comes in the portrayal of John Marston himself as a sad-eyed, sympathetic and tragic figure being manipulated into erasing his past mistakes by a force of questionable morality. Rockstar's scriptwriting is industry-best, and it's the multidimensional depiction of Marston, as well as those who he encounters, that offers a whole other layer of investment for the player that a typical narrative-driven game couldn't hope to replicate.



WHY IT'S A FUTURE CLASSIC

Red Dead Redemption represents a high point in sandbox-based game design, storytelling and contemporising the Western for today's audience. Inspired by *Unforgiven*, *Tombstone* and many other cinematic sources, it's the high point of Rockstar's ongoing efforts to deconstruct America's cultural identity, as well as a videogame built on so many sophisticated systems that it always offers a compelling reason to come back.

Rockstar is about to release *Grand Theft Auto V*, which will exceed the size and detail of *Red Dead*'s world considerably. Yet it's the amazing effort to create a convincing period piece that will always set *Red Dead* apart from the company's equally compelling sister series – this isn't simply *GTA* with a Western theme slapped on. It's part homage to a cornerstone of popular culture, part reinvention of a genre that Rockstar itself pioneered, and a distinctive work that'll remain influential for years to come.

Things of note



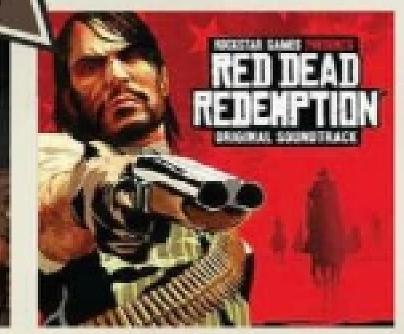
Open season

Beyond the single-player, *Red Dead*'s multiplayer built upon the *GTA IV* template of opening up the entire map, dotting forts and other areas of interest to give structure to the chaos.



Man of war, man of peace

Red Dead was sold as the pursuit of a criminal. Yet, the theme is ultimately of a man unable to escape his past mistakes, as John Marston's outlaw life haunts him to the end.



Mexico and José González

Red Dead's most talked about moment comes when Marston enters Mexico, and the astonishing transition to this other land with an original track by José González.



Horror comes West

Of the all the people who own *Red Dead*, we wonder how many sampled the generous DLC *Undead Nightmare*, which adds a whole horror-themed (and amazing) campaign for a mere £7.



Voicing John Marston

Rob Wiethoff put in a landmark performance as John Marston that showed how far ahead of its time Rockstar is with its storytelling. His wry put-downs were very well written also.



» [PS3] By the third act of the game you've unlocked West Elizabeth, which adds a small city, lake and mountain range to the ludicrously-sized map.



» [PS3] There are few blank spots in the wilderness due to *Red Dead*'s complex ecosystem and random events.



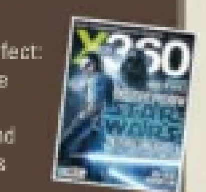
» [PS3] *Red Dead*'s well-acted and brilliantly written cast brought John Marston's story a genuine energy.

What the press thought



games™
Score: 9/10
"Its highs are subtle, but unique in that few other games communicate such feelings of beauty and brilliance."

X360
Score: 9/10
"*RDR* isn't perfect: there are some control issues to navigate, and sometimes it is unclear what exactly you have to do next. But these are minor quibbles."



Evolution of Beat-'em-ups

Hadoukens, rising tackles and hellsweeps have become familiar language for almost all gamers. But how did two people hitting each other become one of gaming's most popular genres?

















Ryu flying off the ground, fist reaching for the sky. Heihachi's grey peaks, sprouting like wings from the sides of his bald head. Sub-Zero holding a spinal cord aloft by the head, blood dripping below. There have been a lot of iconic images in the fighting games genre, the purest form of competition in videogames that pits you against your opponent in an attempt to crush them. But it all started with a humble digital boxing match.

Heavyweight Champ by Sega was the first ever 'fighting' game, a black and white arcade boxing title released in 1976, where the action was controlled by two boxing gloves and players could sway the cabinet itself to move from side to side, dodging incoming punches. Yet despite that promising start, it took a while for the genre to find its feet, but when the first wave of fighting games did finally arrive in the mid-Eighties, they all riffed on the same idea – mimicking karate and kung-fu fighting styles, which were culturally relevant at the time thanks to the sudden popularity of Eastern martial arts films. *Kung-Fu Master* saw the player working their way through a tower of goons and increasingly bizarre enemies, such as confetti balls and falling pots while *Karate Champ* recreated one-versus-one competition in a karate dojo. While those titles proved popular in the arcades, Eastern European title *Kung Fu* brought the genre to the home, via the 48k Spectrum.

"While making *Kung Fu* I was learning Assembler, but it was fun and exciting so I cannot count it as a difficulty," recalls Dusko Dimitrijevic, *Kung Fu*'s programmer. "Our main problem was how to put 'graphics' into the computer. That sounds strange now, but then there was no digital cameras, digitisers, scanners or even usable drawing software. At least we had none of those."

Surprisingly, despite the fact that the genre started to make waves in the arcade, Dusko's *Kung Fu* had been created independently of their influence, mostly as arcades in Eastern Europe had difficulty keeping up with the latest titles. "I have seen nothing even close before," Dusko tells us. "When *Kung Fu* was published I heard about a similar arcade game. A friend of mine who just returned from Germany told me about an arcade *Kung Fu* game that even had a similar replay option. At the time we had arcade games here, but, as with everything else, we were few years behind the world, so the best we could find would be like *Pac-Man*."

The popularity of *Karate Champ* began to inspire others, such as 1985's *Way Of The Exploding Fist* and *International Karate*, both of which continued to refine the one-versus-one ideas put forth by *Karate Champ*. But it was 1987's *Yie Ar Kung-Fu* that was the biggest step towards the genre we recognise today. It had health bars that would deplete in chunks for each hit and, more importantly, it had a series of opponents with their own unique fighting style. Two of the opponents, Star and Fan, would throw shuriken and fans respectively. This meant that for the first time in the fighting games genre, there was the challenge of getting past a wall of projectiles to land damage on your opponent – something those who have faced Guile or Athena players in later Capcom and SNK games will no doubt be familiar with today.

> **"At that time, most of the machines in the arcade were fighting games"**
> Masaaki Hoshino

Fighting games were now arriving thick and fast, and 1987 was a hugely important year for the genre. First was the release of the *International Karate* sequel, *IK+*, which had one-vs-one-vs-one combat. "After playing to death all the other 'karate' and fighting games in general, I wanted to come up with something that none of the others had shown, as they were all getting a bit samey," explains Archer MacLean. "When you see fight scenes in some films set in a Dojo, they often have the other fighters seated around the edge of the fighting area, and I wanted to somehow show fighters getting up to take their turn, while the retiring player goes and sits down or is dragged off for medical attention with his missing limbs in a basket. So, when doing *IK1* animation I watched dozens of films for move-inspiration. So one day I'm watching Jackie Chan in the original *Cannonball Run* fighting off hoards of angry bikers and doing a double kick and I realised that I could just about make the C64s limited sprite system show three overlapping characters. Without overlaps I could just draw them with bitmapped character cells, and that's why the pause mode in *IK+* 8-bit and 16-bit has six dancing characters on the screen."

But Capcom also released its own fighting game that same year, featuring hidden special moves, pressure pads that had to be hit with the strength of the move you wanted and character portraits designed by a young artist who had just started at the company, Keiji Inafune. That game was *Street Fighter*...

Street Fighter did not make a huge impact, but Capcom decided to push ahead with a sequel based on the success of another of its arcade titles released two years later – *Final Fight*. American arcades found themselves flooded with those trying to clean up the streets of

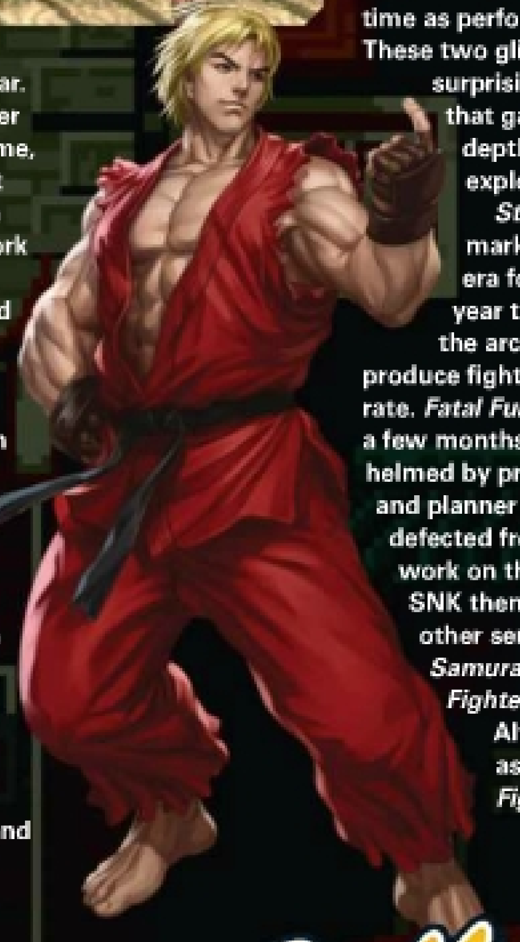



» [Arcade] *Street Fighter II* breathed fresh new life into the genre.

Metro City with Cody, Guy and Haggar. Although it was a side-scrolling fighter rather than a 'traditional' fighting game, Capcom saw the proof it needed that there was potential in the genre for a monster hit, immediately starting work on a *Street Fighter* sequel.

When *Street Fighter II* was released in 1991, its impact was immediate. It began with an iconic cast of characters who were all selectable, from American hero Guile to Brazilian monster Blanka. Each fighter was a curious mix of national stereotypes and quirky design that has endured to this day, backed by memorable theme tunes such as the workman-like percussion for Zangief and the bellowing elephants on Dhalsim's stage. Each fighter also had their own distinct fighting style and trademark moves, such as Guile's keepaway tactics or Zangief's attempts to close the gap and land a spinning piledriver.

Enhancing the appeal was a bug discovered in testing. The glitch that allowed players to cancel normal attacks into special moves to create combination attacks. This was left in as a hidden feature but would become a staple of the game and eventually the genre itself. Another less known glitch, known as the CPS-1 glitch (as it only worked on the CPS-1 arcade board), allowed players to chain together light attacks by pressing hard punch at the same time as performing the light attacks. These two glitches combined to create a surprisingly deep combo system that gave *Street Fighter II* the depth it needed to ensure it exploded as a competitive game.



Street Fighter II's release marked the start of a golden era for the genre. In the same year that Capcom's sequel hit the arcades, SNK also started to produce fighting games at a dizzying rate. *Fatal Fury* was actually released a few months before *Street Fighter II*, helmed by producer Takashi Nishiyama and planner Hiroshi Matsumoto who defected from Capcom following their work on the original *Street Fighter*. SNK then followed *Fatal Fury* with other series such as *Art Of Fighting*, *Samurai Shodown*, *The King Of Fighters* and *The Last Blade*.

Although they wouldn't prove as popular globally as *Street Fighter II* and its various sequels, SNK's titles found strongholds in Mexico, South America, Pakistan and China, where they usurped Capcom's famous series. It was all thanks to the Neo Geo MVS format. Unlike CPS-1, Neo Geo MVS was cost effective for coin-op operators, who could swap games and artwork for those new titles as they were released. Neo Geo carts were cheaper than typical arcade boards, plus there were plenty of bootlegs in circulation. All this contributed to arcades in poorer countries being able to afford Neo Geo MVS titles, and also charging less per credit, ensuring their popularity.

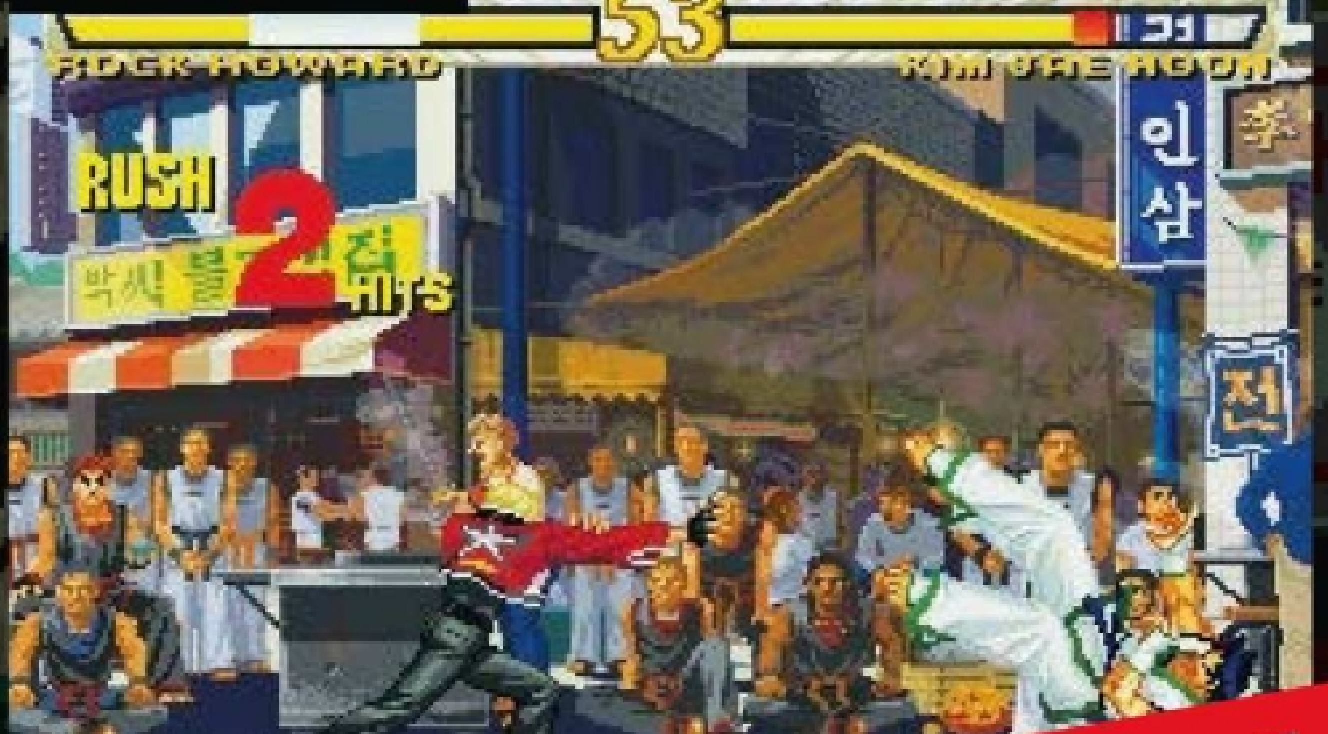
But advancing technology saw a whole new battle begin within the genre. "At that time, most of the machines in the arcade were fighting games, and there was usually a line waiting to play them," recalls Masaaki Hoshino, current producer of the *SoulCalibur* series. "The *Street Fighter* series, as well as other 2D fighters, were the most popular. But players who became interested in the detailed, frame-by-frame strategy involved in 3D fighters started to become drawn to *Virtua Fighter* and *Tekken*."

Street Fighter II might have scored a clean victory over its 2D rivals, but the fight between *Virtua Fighter* and *Tekken* was far messier.

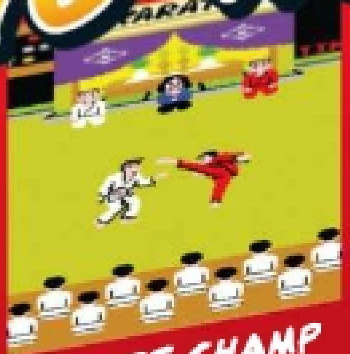
Like *Street Fighter II*, *Virtua Fighter*'s impact in the arcades was immediate. It was the first polygon-based fighting game, which meant it had a whole wealth of new ideas and tricks that hadn't been seen before. Players could triumph by forcing their opponent out of the ring and replays of knockout blows were shown after each win. Fighters had fighting styles vaguely modelled after real martial arts. But most of all, it was the sheer novelty factor of a 3D fighting game that brought *Virtua Fighter* praise and attention. No one had seen anything quite like Sega's fighting game. It was a huge hit.

One company that felt it could tackle *Virtua Fighter* was Namco. Having established arcade racing dominance with *Ridge Racer* in the same year as *Virtua Fighter*'s release, Namco turned its attention to fighting games. Namco and Sony Computer Entertainment had been working together on the SYSTEM11 arcade board, which was based on the same hardware that would be used in Sony's upcoming console, the PlayStation. The first release on the new arcade board was *Tekken* in 1994.

» [Arcade] By the time *Garou: Mark Of The Wolves* was released, everyone was wrongly obsessed with 3D fighters.



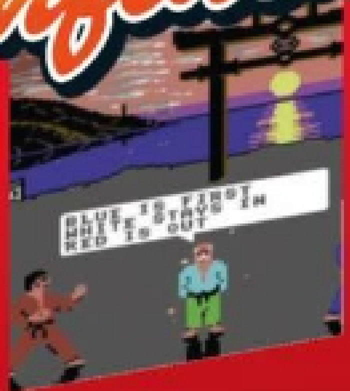
10 Most Influential Games



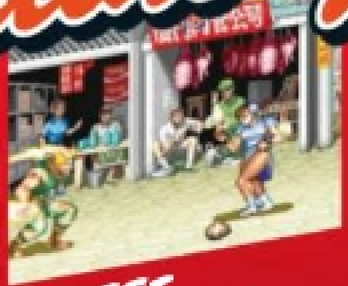
KARATE CHAMP
1984 ■ Data East
The first 'true' beat-'em-up, *Karate Champ* was a one-versus-one contest set in a dojo with other competitors kneeling around the edge of the arena, closely mirroring actual karate competitions. There were no health bars, with victory awarded to whoever landed the first strike.



YIE AR KUNG-FU
1985 ■ Konami
The first real step towards the fighting games genre we know today, *Yie Ar Kung-Fu* featured health bars and a series of opponents with their own distinct special moves and fighting styles. Some opponents also threw projectiles, making this the first fighting game where you had to dodge them to get close and land hits.



IK+
1987 ■ Archer MacLean
Although its one-vs-one-vs-one combat remains unique to this day, the success of *IK+* laid the groundwork for fighting games in the West, opening up the genre to new audiences and paving the way for the explosive global success of later titles.



STREET FIGHTER II
1991 ■ Capcom
The game that introduced the likes of Chun-Li, Guile, Zangief et al to the world. So many innovations here, so little space to discuss them, but the most significant legacy (outside of Guile's Theme Goes With Everything meme videos) is that of the combo system, which was a bug left in as a hidden feature.



MORTAL KOMBAT
1992 ■ Midway
Although its gameplay was exposed as flawed at higher levels of play, that was almost besides the point. The illicit nature of the gruesome fatalities and the media storm surrounding it ensured *Mortal Kombat* was a huge hit for Midway, which meant it was the closest rival to *Street Fighter II* for many years.



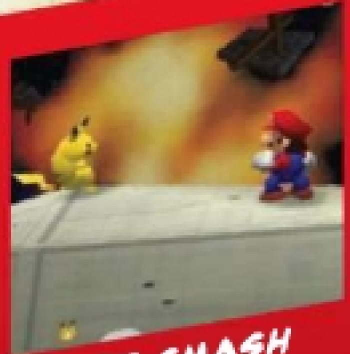
VIRTUA FIGHTER
1993 ■ Sega
Following the success of *Virtua Racing* on Sega Model 1, AM2 then created *Virtua Fighter* for the arcade board, the first fighting game to feature 3D polygon graphics. It was a breath of fresh air that showed the future possibilities of the genre – as a gameplay and visual showcase, it was stunning.



SUPER STREET FIGHTER II TURBO
1994 ■ Capcom
Plenty has been said about *Street Fighter II* already. What's significant about *Super Street Fighter II Turbo*, the last entry in the *Street Fighter II* series, is that it's still played in tournaments to this very day in Japan, US and Europe. It's arguably the most influential competitive fighting game of all time.



TEKKEN 3
1997 ■ Namco
Although *Virtua Fighter* initially proved more popular, *Tekken* benefitted from the popular PlayStation platform for its console releases. *Tekken 3* is when Namco effectively ended the battle between the two series, crushing its rival over 7 million copies sold and becoming the leading 3D fighting game.



SUPER SMASH BROS
1999 ■ Nintendo
Although not the first crossover title that saw characters from different series coming together in the name of fighting – *Marvel Vs Capcom: Clash Of Super Heroes* beat *Super Smash Bros* by a year – this was Nintendo's first step into the genre, leading to a hugely successful series.



STREET FIGHTER IV
2009 ■ Capcom
This effectively signalled the rebirth of fighting games on home consoles following the genre's eventual decline in the arcades. Although it had new characters such as C Viper and Abel plus a new Focus mechanic, it was essentially a back-to-basics approach that won the day, with simple combos and familiar faces such as Chun-Li and Blanka.


» [Arcade] *Marvel Vs Capcom 2: New Age Of Heroes* received a HD update in 2009.


» [Arcade] SNK continued to evolve its *King Of Fighters* series. This is *The King Of Fighters 2002*.

Although they were both distinct in that they were 3D fighting games, there were plenty of differences between *Virtua Fighter* and its new rival. *Tekken* had no ring-outs, with the stages endlessly stretching out when fighters moved away from the centre of the stage. The cast was more eccentric that *Virtua Fighter*'s, with *Tekken* sporting the likes of Yoshimitsu, King and Kuma. Most importantly, *Virtua Fighter* had a three-button system for punch, kick and guard versus *Tekken*'s system of a button for each of the fighter's limbs, something that made the eventual PlayStation port seem like a natural fit for Namco's brawler.

"It was the era of early polygon technology, so we were focusing on development methods for creating 3D humanoid character models and the animation technology necessary to make them move, as we saw this as core technology needed for the next ten years to come," explains *Tekken* director Katsuhiro Harada. "It seemed a logical choice of button assignment to naturally control a character in-game. It was also a good match for the button layout of the PlayStation controller. But the arcade version was developed first, so the arcade button layout and that of the PlayStation controller are different."

Released on Sony's console a year after it hit the arcades, *Tekken* benefitted from weaker competition against the likes of *Battle Arena Toshinden*, becoming one of the flagship series for PlayStation and selling millions. *Virtua Fighter*'s platform was Sega Saturn, limiting its exposure and potential audience. The success of their respective consoles proved to be a crucial turning point in the battle for 3D fighting game dominance because, in the arcades, there was a clear winner.

"Honestly, Namco didn't have much experience with fighting games at that time, so not a lot of thought was put into the strategic elements typical of current fighting games," continues Harada. "I'll be honest, *Tekken* was pretty much overlooked in the arcades, and didn't really trend among the arcade players. In Japan, it is usually the case that a fighting game has two machines connected back-to-back. But for unpopular fighting games, sometimes it is just on one machine alone, as the lack of popularity hardly merits using two arcade machines and the space they require. *Tekken* was exactly like that, and most often was on a sole machine with no one playing. There was one arcade in Shinjuku where it was popular, but that community was probably the only one in Japan at that time. At that time, *Virtua Fighter* was quite popular in Japan and had a decent following. Honestly, I was jealous, and it was an object I looked at with both fear and respect."


» [Arcade] Capcom and SNK eventually joined forces.


» [PlayStation 2] *Virtua Fighter 4 Evolution* in all its glory.





» [Arcade] *Soul Edge* was an excellent alternative to the superb *SoulCalibur*.

Virtua Fighter's dominance drove Harada to do anything necessary to help *Tekken* gain more exposure in Japanese arcades. "I assembled a character costume with the company's money, and organised tournaments and helped hype the game while cosplaying as that character," Harada tells us. "*Tekken* was so unknown that I had to resort to those drastic measures to gain attention for the game."

But just as 2D fighting games were struggling for some semblance of balance – *Street Fighter II: Championship Edition* had a ridiculously overpowered M Bison while 'SNK boss syndrome' meant that those playing either *Fatal Fury* or *The King Of Fighters* on their own didn't escape at all lightly either – 3D fighting games also found balance to be a fairly elusive element at times.

"One interesting episode is that *Tekken*, as a competitive fighting game, was so unbalanced that rather than guarding King's elbow attack it was common consensus to crouch and eat it on purpose, rather than guard," continues Harada. "The same with Nina's Kneel Kick. Players would move forward instead of guard because, for some reason, you could counterattack Nina if you did so. When you hear this now it sounds crazy but, at the time, it was common knowledge to everyone. Most fighting game players try hard to guard everything, but expert *Tekken* players would let a move hit them on purpose. I still remember to this day the perplexed look on the faces of *Virtua Fighter* and *Street Fighter* players when seeing this."

> "I wanted to come up with something that none of the others had shown"
> Archer MacLean

With the success of *Tekken* on PlayStation giving Namco a new sense of confidence, it quickly moved onto a new 3D fighting game series to accompany *Tekken* – the weapons-based brawler *SoulEdge*. Despite the immense competition in the fighting game genre, Hoshino says that the team didn't feel intimidated by joining the increasingly competitive genre.

"Our goal was to create a weapon-based fighting game that made more use of the 3D playing field for its fighting mechanics, and featured high-end graphics with more improved lighting," he explains. "As such, there was more a feeling of excitement about trying on accomplishing this, rather than a feeling of pressure. Also, we put quite a bit of effort into the story setting and character development to attract more female gamers, and others who wouldn't normally try out a fighting game."

Hoshino says his personal highlight was watching footage of *SoulEdge* as the Namco fighter made its first public bow at Japan's Amusement Machine Show in 1995: "A game designer, still a new recruit, used the limited assets available at that time to create [the video footage]. He used the controller to carefully and precisely control the camera for cinematic flare, and then put a lot of care into editing to surprising effect. We were all very happy that many people were looking forward to the game after seeing the footage, and the motivation of everyone on the team greatly increased. A lot of ideas began to come to us at that time as well. This perhaps led to our pursuit of a high level of graphic quality and features that, as a result, saw the implementation of the well-received interactive ending sequences, and the editable opening sequence in the Dreamcast version."

SoulCalibur found a new home outside of the arcade on Dreamcast, as 3D fighting games continued to soar on console with the *Tekken* and *Virtua Fighter* series joined by new upstart *Dead Or Alive*. But eventually, and perhaps inevitably, the power of the fighting game began to wane. As *Street Fighter* grew increasingly complex with its combo system (*Alpha* series) and defensive options (*Street Fighter III*), only hardcore fans stuck around. Financial troubles saw SNK collapse, later reborn as SNK Playmore. Even 3D fighting game series had their momentum slowed with mediocre entries – *Virtua Fighter 3*, *Tekken 4* and *Soul Calibur III* all disappointed fans.



» [Arcade] *Tekken 3* was another hit for Namco, in arcades and on PlayStation.

The biggest factor in the genre was how the status of fighting games in arcades was changing. In an attempt to draw crowds from consoles, arcades begun to turn away from fighting games and towards unique arcade cabinets that would provide experiences you simply couldn't get at home. The growth of competitive play thanks to tournaments like EVO and Super Battle Opera helped fighting games stay relevant during a lean period but, ultimately, muscled out of arcades and without decent online play, fighting games found themselves in limbo. Xbox Live was the first step on the road to recovery with online play for *Capcom Vs SNK 2: EO* and *Street Fighter Anniversary Collection*, but it would take the invention and evolution of GGPO technology to provide the first real alternative to arcade play.

As we all know, *Street Fighter IV* would bring the genre back with a vengeance in 2009, and we now have fighting games spanning crossover titles (*Street Fighter X Tekken*), new IP (*Skullgirls*), HD re-releases (*Darkstalkers Resurrection*), free-to-play (*Tekken Revolution*) amongst familiar faces such as *Tekken*, *SoulCalibur*, *Dead Or Alive* and *The King Of Fighters*. Progress has come at a cost. Almost all of the top fighting game arcades outside of Japan have closed their doors, such as New York's Chinatown Fair (2011), London's Trocadero (2011) and LA's Family Fun Arcade (2012). The cost of 2D animation has seen Capcom now default to a less interesting '2.5D' style of visuals, with only ArcSys and *The King Of Fighters* flying the flag for hand-drawn animation.

But some things never change. The cry of "Shoryuken!" as Ryu flies into the air is still common. Heihachi's hair still makes no sense. Sub-Zero is still fond of solving disagreements by reaching for spinal cords. Hopefully, the rebirth of the fighting game genre means that we'll see a whole host of new iconic images in the years to come.


» Yoshinori Ono (far right) has become synonymous with the *Street Fighter* brand.

The Street Fighter

Yoshinori Ono, Street Fighter's producer, looks back at its past and successful revival

We've heard that you played a lot of *Final Fight* in the arcades when you were younger. What do you remember most about the arcade scene in Japan when *Street Fighter II* was released?

At that time, 'competing' in games meant racing games, or high score games, so *Street Fighter* really brought a 'physical' element into the virtual realm. The characters, graphics and especially the 'tools' that the game made available to players had never been seen in an arcade game up until then, and it all exploded in popularity with *Street Fighter II*. The virtual battles in-game even lead to numerous fights in real life (laugh). That is how passionately and seriously the players took these tools of competition, and I remember it all vividly. Players who won could keep on playing without paying any more money, but those who lost had those ten seconds that the timer was counting down to either put in more money and continue or give up all together. The mixed feelings of humiliation from losing but also the financial implications of putting in more money to rematch was a big hit to the players' hearts and wallets.

What do you think it is that made *Street Fighter II* so special compared to other fighting games?

I believe it's because each of the characters are so unique. The combination of their personalities, moves and background stories all work together to create a fantastic universe. Characters such as Blanka and Dhalsim don't exist in real life, but they were created with human elements in mind. In this way the emotions that were put into each character resonate with people and their memories of the game. Also, it was the first game that really provided the full set of 'tools' for players to utilise to compete with each other. *Street Fighter IV* continued the legacy of the DNA that came from *Street Fighter II*.

What was it that made Capcom decide to bring *Street Fighter* back with *Street Fighter IV*?

I personally loved this series and started working on it since *SFIII: 3rd Strike*. One of the reasons I joined Capcom 20 years ago was because I wanted to create *Street Fighter* games. Before *SFIV* was released, out of the 2,000 Capcom employees, no one wanted a new *Street Fighter* game except for the 50 people on the development team [laughs]. Since the situation was so stacked against us, we wanted to make the revival happen even more [laughs]. Also, the continued support of the media and fans who keep asking for a new *SF* title greatly contributed to the revitalisation of the series.

***Street Fighter IV* has been the most popular fighting game this generation and revived the genre. Why do you think it was so popular?**

I believe it's because the original *SF* and *SFII* created the foundation for fighting games that *SFIV* became so popular. The concept behind the creation of *SFIV* was a 'return to the beginning'. The college students who spent hours on their SNES playing the home console version of *SFII* are all fathers now, and we wanted to let them experience that same nostalgic feeling. Also, the people who were kids when *SFII* came out are now college students. We wanted to provide a new gameplay experience for them as well. The intent was to create a product that brought together both old and new. When you look at tournaments and even this year's EVO, you can always see new talent rising up to challenge the old guard. Because we have this kind of history with the series, I believe many people can enjoy the games.



Hall of Brawlers

THE COOLEST FIGHTERS FROM THE PAST 30 YEARS



RYU

Ryu has served as the iconic character for fighting games as a whole, let alone *Street Fighter*, while 'Hadouken' and 'Shoryuken' have become iconic terms. The Japanese for hurricane kick? Not so much.



TERRY

SNK's first 'lead character' in fighting games, Terry Bogard is defined by his sleeveless red top, red *Fatal Fury* cap and lines like "Are you okay? Busteeeer Wolf!"



HAOHMARU

The most relatable character in Samurai Shodown's cast of eccentric fighters, Haohmaru has brought his samurai sword to the likes of *Capcom Vs SNK 2*, *SNK Vs Capcom* and *Neo Geo Battle Coliseum*.



FALCON

Just about every character in *Super Smash Bros* is recognisable thanks to Nintendo's heritage, but the top-tier terror who dominated Melee tournaments and has come to represent the series is Falcon.



PAUL

Although many *Tekken* characters have stood the test of time, Paul's hairdo and easy-to-learn playing style (endless Deathfists for some players) meant he stood out from the Mishimas as a fan favourite.



KARATE CHAMP

The simple karate practitioner was one of the first fighting game characters and his design has endured through the likes of SNK's Kim, Takuma and Mr Karate.



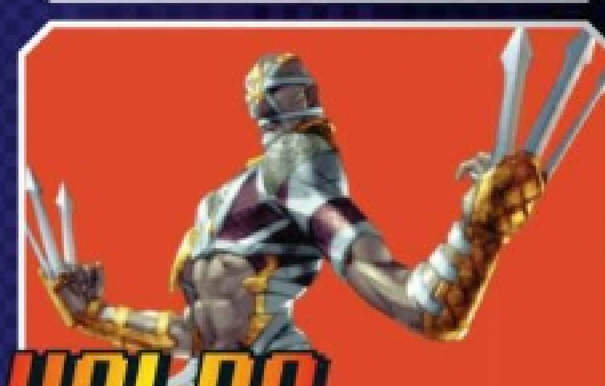
AKIRA

He looks like a bland karate dojo-style brawler but his fighting style, a series of fast, powerful blows with extremely complex execution (at least up until *VF5*), meant he was an expert-only character.



SCORPION

Mortal Kombat's ninjas, Scorpion and Sub-Zero, were the hottest (or coolest) characters since the beginning. It was *Scorpion*'s 'get over here!' spear move that became a series trademark though.



VOLDO

SoulCalibur's characters tend to share equal billing but Voldo is the one image that while burn in your eyes long after playing, thanks to his odd neutral stance and fetish for bondage gear.

TIME 27



LEI-LEI

Felicia, Demitri and BB Hood are equally well known, but Lei-Lei is a more unusual example of a popular character as she's so unorthodox and difficult to use effectively.



HIBIKI

The most well known of the *Last Blade* crew, thanks to an appearance in *Capcom Vs SNK 2* where she emerged as one of the stronger characters and certainly one of the most unique.



BONNE JENET

SNK's English pirate girl first emerged in *Garou: Mark Of The Wolves* and has been a fan favourite since. Her unusual fighting style, relying on tricky air moves, means that she's fairly unique in the genre too.



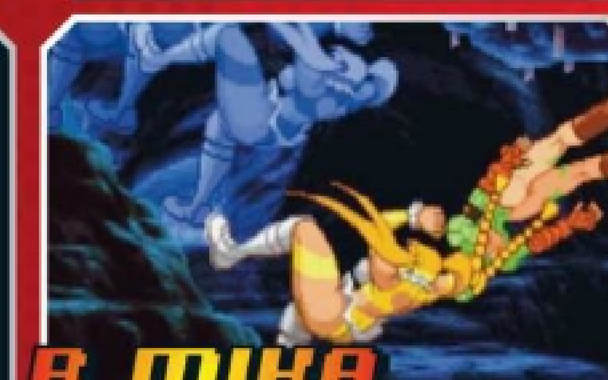
SOL BADGUY

Guilty Gear's answer to Ryu popularised the term 'dustloop', a combo that sees Sol looping the same corner combo that involves the Dust button.



Q

Street Fighter III brought in a wealth of new faces, but it was *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike*'s Q who really captured everyone's imagination because no-one really knew who he was. Man? Robot? Both?



R MIKA

Alpha's most requested character who hasn't been brought back in *Street Fighter IV*, R Mika had an unusual fighting style where she was a grappler with a series of throws that had delays on them.



KASUMI

Clearly the face of *Dead Or Alive*, Kasumi has been a series mainstay and the first character to appear on all promotional material such as trailers and artwork.



ATHENA

She started in 1986's *Psycho Soldier* but eventually crossed over to the *King Of Fighters* series, where she became one of the most popular and recognisable faces in the franchise.



KYO

Whether it's Kyo or Iori, take your pick for a *King Of Fighters* lead character. These two serve as the Ryu and Ken of the series, or perhaps the Ryu and Akuma – Kyo being the 'hero' and Iori the evil, deranged character.

CLASSIC MOMENTS

The Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past

» PLATFORM: SNES » DEVELOPER: NINTENDO » RELEASED: 1992

When Link is first cast into the Dark World, it's all a bit surreal. Transformed into a pink bunny, and left with just a blob and a friendly fiend for company, it seems like a quick one-off set piece and nothing more. But then, when Agahnim drags Link into the Dark World for a second time, it clicks. This isn't a set piece. This is an entirely different world. Although based on the same map, the two worlds are wildly different in terms of layout and population – new dungeons appeared in previously explored locations while super-tough enemies ran amok. Success would rely upon clever use of portals and the Magic Mirror to quickly leap between the two planes of existence and, although this mechanic has been commonplace in games ever since, it can all be traced back to Link's original mind-blowing, dimension-hopping antics.

BIO

Oh, it's just one of the greatest games of all time, that's all. Returning to the format of the original game rather than its divisive sequel, Nintendo created an open world that was endlessly enjoyable to explore and one that rewarded curiosity and persistence wonderfully. Even today, after so many sequels, *A Link To The Past* holds up as perhaps the definitive *Zelda* experience – modern interpretations have tended to be more formulaic and gimmick-heavy, so this freeform adventure (where success doesn't always hinge on the last tool you found) is rightly regarded as a timeless classic.

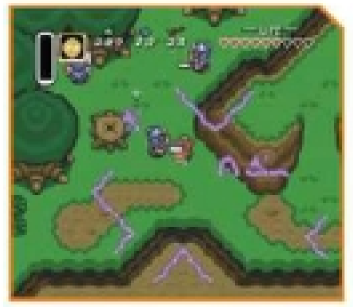
MORE CLASSIC A LINK TO THE PAST MOMENTS

Gotta Catch 'Em All!



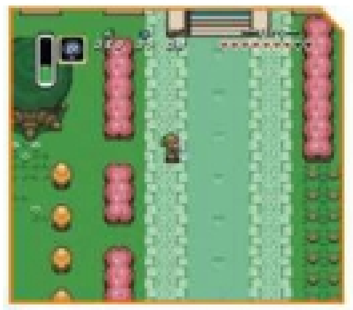
Fairies are useful enough when you can just grab them for a quick energy refill, but that moment when you realise that you can carry the buggers around with you is one that you'll never forget. To be fair, the guy who gives you the bug net isn't exactly subtle about its uses but, even so, swiping a fairy out of the air and storing it in a jar for later was an incredible sensation. And the surprise of being revived by one was even better.

A Kind Of Magic



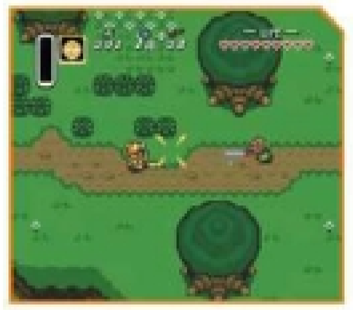
Early in the game, it doesn't seem like Link's magic gauge is going to be very important. Sure, it lets you set fire to stuff and light up dark areas, but that's hardly what anyone other than cavemen would call 'magic'. Explore the further reaches of Hyrule and you'll find numerous ways to put that meter to far more impressive use, from the handy Ice Rod to the secret medallions that grant Link unique abilities.

A Link To The Fast



Top-down games of the time had a tendency to be slower and more considered than side-scrolling efforts. While Link isn't exactly slow with his basic gear, the introduction of the Pegasus Boots turns him into a little green lightning bolt, meaning you could race through earlier areas and decimate any enemies in your path. But, we'll never forget how long it took us to realise that charging into objects could shake items free. That bloody book…

Obey Your Master

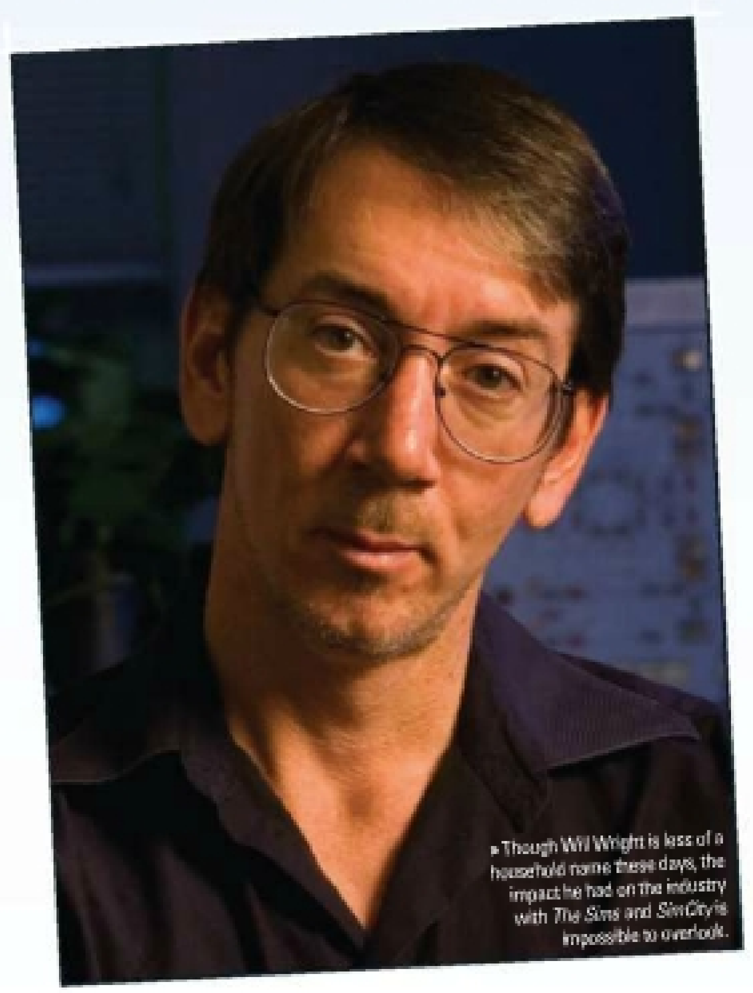


It's all 'Master Sword this, Master Sword that' in *Zelda* games, but the speed at which you can get your hands on it here is amazing. Three simple dungeons, three easy bosses (well, two easy bosses and that annoying worm thing) and three medallions are all that stand between you and this mighty weapon, which gives Link a ranged attack while at full health and allows him to take on Agahnim to first reach the Dark World.



The Sims

Even now, The Sims remains the second best-selling PC game of all time – beaten only by its sequel, The Sims 2 – solidifying its position as one of the games industry's most influential titles. Adam Barnes speaks to its creator Will Wright about how these digital people were born



» Though Will Wright is less of a household name these days, the impact he had on the industry with *The Sims* and *SimCity* is impossible to overlook.

It's surprising to consider that *The Sims* – the best-selling PC franchise of all time – nearly wasn't made. Its creator, Will Wright, had a battle on his hands as he tried to develop the idea, and no one at Maxis shared that vision. It was, in Wright's own words, "a struggle". But, it was something *he* wanted to play, and he knew that others must feel the same; they did about *SimCity* after all. But, how did such a unique concept for a videogame – namely the manipulation of tiny virtual people and their everyday lives – come to be?



» [PC] There was a gradual expansion to your home as the Simoleans came rolling in.

"I was always interested in architecture and architectural design," Will Wright explains, "and after *SimCity* I started thinking that I wanted to do something that was more around designing structures. So originally, it was more meant to be an architectural version of *SimCity*. As I went down that path I started thinking I needed some way to 'score' what it was that you were building, and so I knew I needed little people living in these structures that you were designing. I spent a lot of time thinking about how to make the behaviour of these people very robust, interesting and plausible no matter what kind of environment you put them in." Creating these tiny people – AI characters that would interact with the structures built within the simulation – took about two years of Will's life, in between a variety of other projects. *SimCity* had become a huge success and, as a result, Maxis had a little freedom to create ideas that it wanted to see made. For Will Wright, that would end up being *The Sims*.





» [PC] This interface was later used in future Maxis games. Even 2013's *SimCity* used a similar style overlay.



» [PC] The ultimate goal for most players was to buy the mansion.



» [PC] Somehow *The Sims* managed to turn 'Find A Job' into an entertaining gameplay mechanic.

"It turned out that controlling the little people was actually more interesting," recalls Will. "It was still fun designing houses for them, but controlling their lives actually turned out to be far more compelling, so the whole project took a turn towards the people. I kept the architecture tools in there, but then I just really started focusing more on the people and objects and their behaviours and relationships – all that sort of stuff."

But Maxis wasn't convinced. Though Will detailed the project and what he hoped it would be, the company was nonplussed; why play a game about emulating real-life when videogames could help us live out our wildest fantasies? "When I was describing it to them [Maxis] – even with the focus on the people – they were hearing a game about taking out the trash and cleaning out your bathroom and it just doesn't sound very interesting to them compared to saving the world or flying a jet fighter." Will persisted, however, knowing it was something he needed to make. "But I kind of understood that people are fascinated with people," he says, "and I knew it was interesting to me and I kind of had to fight for it internally. At first, nobody was behind the project. We had some programmers who were in a tool group that we weren't using really so I turned it into a Black Box project on my side and said 'can I have these four programmers', and nobody really cared so they said 'yeah'."

> **"I always thought of it kind of as a human flocking simulator"**
> Will Wright

It wasn't just his fellow developers that he had to convince either, with the game concept that would turn out to be one of the most important PC games of all time struggling to even appeal to focus testers in the earliest stages of development. "We even did a focus group back in, I think, '93," states Will, "where we were focus testing about five different game concepts. I remember [with] the other four the focus testers said 'oh yeah, it was pretty good, we would play that', but when it came to *The Sims* and we were describing the idea to them, they were all universally like 'oh that's such a stupid idea, we would never play that, we hate that idea'. It totally bombed in the focus group."



IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** ELECTRONIC ARTS
- » **DEVELOPER:** MAXIS
- » **RELEASED:** 2000
- » **PLATFORM:** VARIOUS
- » **GENRE:** LIFE SIM



» [PS2] The success of *The Sims* meant it was soon ported to various consoles.

Will always believed in the concept, however, and with his secret team of programmers he set about creating an early part of the simulation. He admits now that "it's hard to envision something like *The Sims* when you can't play it and you can't see it", adding that it's always difficult to really sell any idea forged in the back of a designer's mind. It was hard for others to really 'get' what *The Sims* was meant to be. "In my mind I had this concept of what it would feel like, but to expect somebody else to understand and have that concept, it's a hard thing. And I've been in the same position before, where somebody told me some idea they had and I just didn't get it and it sounded kind of stupid. I know the guys who made *Myst* and they were showing me one of the early versions and I was like 'what is this? It's just a slideshow', but once I saw the final version I played it and loved it. But when they were describing it to me in the very early stages I just couldn't wrap my mind around it."

As development went on it was clear that Will needed to flesh out these ideas, and the key way to highlight what it was all about was through these virtual characters. *The Sims* themselves were caricatures of real-life, representatives of what we might look like to an almighty being capable of a higher level of thought. Quaint, simple perhaps – but entertaining all the same. While part of this was down to the limited resources available at the time, there was also a conscious decision to keep the Sims sub-real, to create a real *impression* of people but to ensure that it was enjoyable all the same. "We understood ▶

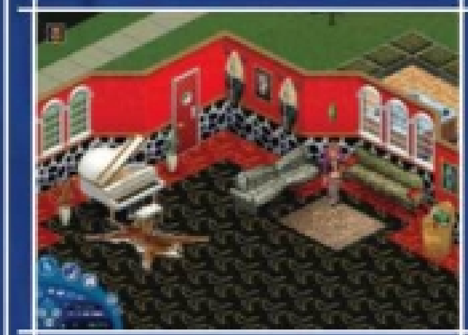


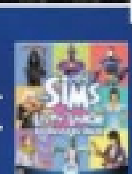
» [PC] Time sped up while your Sims worked, skipping to the very instant they returned.



EXPANDING THE SIMS

The Sims' success steamrolled and, inevitably, expansion packs were released. At the time, The Sims was the game with the most expansion packs ever, surpassed only by later versions of the game

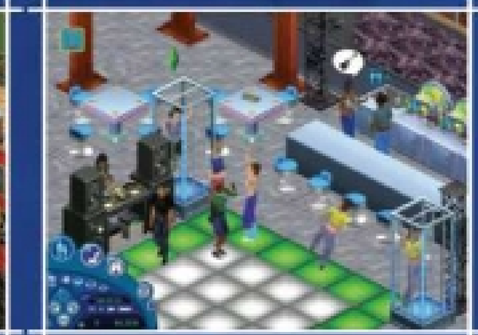




LIVIN' IT UP

AUGUST 2000

■ Months after the release of the original game came *Livin' It Up*, a fairly general expansion pack when compared to later themed ones that brought new items, characters and career paths.



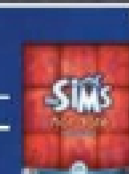


HOUSE PARTY

APRIL 2001

■ Starting the tradition of themed expansion packs, *House Party* introduced the ability for your Sims to call friends around for a social get-together including the necessary items such as balloons and cake.



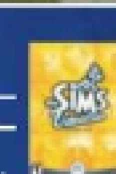


HOT DATE

NOVEMBER 2001

■ As the name suggests, *Hot Date* introduced a reworked relationship system for your Sims, the ability to carry items for gifts, more related items and a separate area in the form of Downtown.

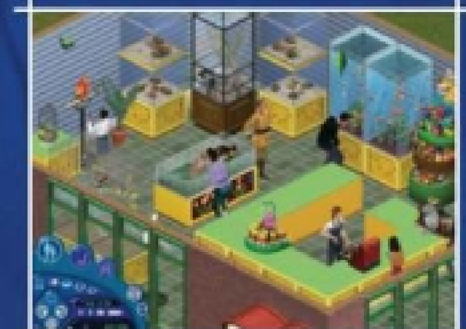




VACATION

MARCH 2002

■ This pack brought a whole new island to explore, including beachside resorts and camping in the forest. It was the first time a Sim – and their friends and family – could stay at a lot that wasn't their own home.

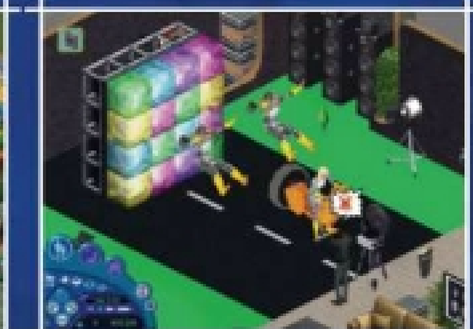


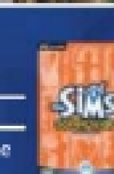


UNLEASHED

NOVEMBER 2002

■ Unleashed remains one of the most popular expansion packs – and was even revisited in *The Sims 2* and *3* – due to the addition of pets that need to be cared for but that cannot be manipulated like your Sims.





SUPERSTAR

MAY 2003

■ With this pack it became possible for your Sims to become superstars, and even included the likenesses of celebrities, from Andy Warhol and Marilyn Monroe to – believe it or not – Avril Lavigne.

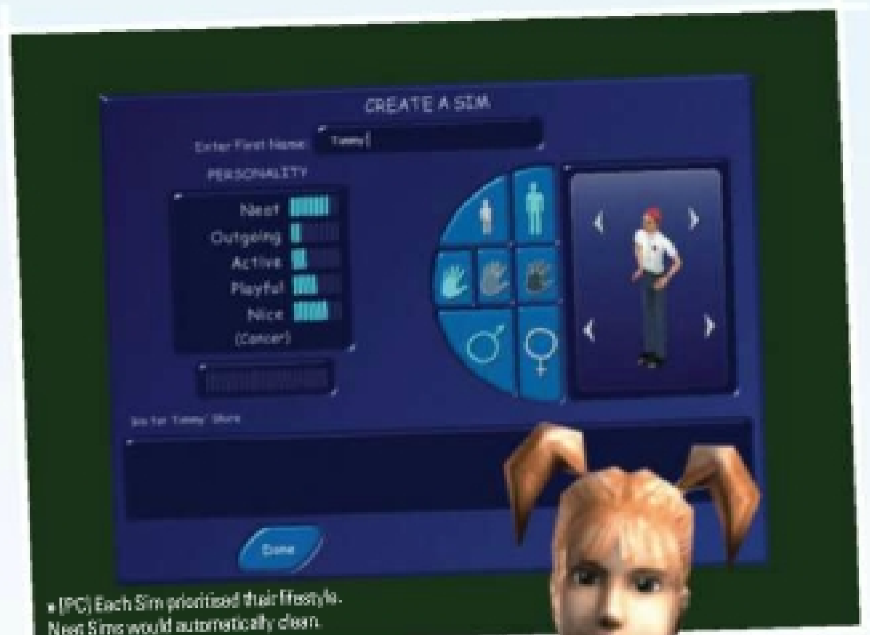




MAKIN' MAGIC

OCTOBER 2003

■ The final expansion pack for *The Sims* introduced a more supernatural element for the first time. *Makin' Magic* had everything from new gameplay mechanics to new items and locations to visit.



» [PC] Each Sim prioritised their lifestyle. Neat Sims would automatically clean.





DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

RAID ON BUNGELING BAY
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 1985

SIMCITY
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 1989

SPORE (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 2008

▶ that at some point we wanted a certain level of abstraction," Will tells us. "Part of that had to do with the amount of detail that we were able to go into in the simulation. I always thought of it kind of as a human flocking simulator. The level of behaviour that I figured we could achieve was like if you were to look out of a balcony window and see people down on the street you could probably get a sense of when they're shopping, when they're arguing or some level of understanding their behaviour but not necessarily every little detail. And that was the target for me, to try and simulate these characters at that level."

Even Simlish, the iconic language that your virtual characters spoke in-game, was purposely chosen to enable the player's imagination, to represent the *idea* of real-life and not to mimic it. "One of the key decisions was the fact that they wouldn't actually be speaking English, that we would actually have them speak their own language. This is one of those situations where the computer is pretty good at simulating certain things and really bad at simulating other things. We could have had them speaking pre-recorded lines or something like that, but it would have destroyed the illusion of reality pretty quickly just because we couldn't provide that level of AI. By having them speak this kind of gibberish, your human imagination actually fills in the blanks and will imagine the conversation. That's really an example of us offloading a portion of the simulation to the human imagination – the portion that the computer is very bad at."

But how did Will set about creating a whole new language? Initial tests focused on more exotic languages as Will tried to hone in on the sound of *The Sims*. "We actually had some Ukrainian programmers working for us and I tried recording some of them speaking Ukrainian and it was a little too obviously slavic, and then I started experimenting with different languages. Navajo was nice but we couldn't find any Navajo voice actors. Estonian was very interesting because Estonian is very hard to locate. It sounds interesting, exotic and like a real language but you can't really associate it with any geographical area – but we only found one Estonian voice actor. And eventually I found these two improv voice actors; they came in and we described to them that we wanted something that sounded like a real language but not really. Together they kind of developed what later became known as Simlish."

Most would recognise a conversation in Simlish if they heard it, and a large part of that is its iconic – and unique – approach to language. As it turns out, *The Sims* was a pretty big success, most notable for its ability to attract people who weren't otherwise interested in games. Sisters and mums were jumping in to try out games for the first time, an unusual occurrance in a medium that was, at the time – primarily, at least – the bastion of teenage boys. "I was actually kind of surprised," says Will of *The Sims'* success. "I figured *The Sims* would either be a pretty big success or a miserable failure, I didn't think there was going to be a lot of in-between. Really, the key to it was getting players into the right mindspace of seeing this game as something that was more creative and about exploring and a little less about winning." *The Sims* was released in February 2000, and two years later it had notched up over 11 million sales – the reach of videogames had officially grown to a much broader group of players. Worldwide, the franchise has now sold over 70 million, and the original version accounts for almost 25 per cent of that with 16 million sales. As EA prepares to release a brand new game in *The Sims 4*, it's clear that the foundations that Will Wright laid 13 years ago have an everlasting appeal that is unlikely to disappear.

> **"I spent a lot of thinking about how to make the behaviour of these people very robust, interesting and plausible"**
> Will Wright



» [PC] It was up to the player whether they wanted a huge house or to raise a family.



» [PC] The interaction tree dictated how your Sims viewed the world.



» [PC] Some Sims are already living in the neighbourhood when you move in.



» [PC] The daily grind was an important aspect to *The Sims*, with personal challenges for your Sims to overcome to earn promotions.



THE UNCONVERTED

Arcade games that never made it home

SPATTER

■ **Developer:** Sega ■ **Year:** 1984 ■ **Genre:** Maze game

■ ***Spatter*'s Japanese title roughly translates as 'Sanrin Sanchan – Mr Tricycle', and while it's obvious why Sega thought a name change might help the game's overseas fortunes, it's less clear why the publisher settled on the name it did. It is possible Sega intended to call it *Splatter* – its gameplay certainly involves squashing and being squashed – but got landed with *Spatter* after consulting a Japanese to English dictionary. What is apparent, though, is *Spatter*'s high quality and uniquely Sega vibe. On first inspection it appears to be a straightforward maze-based collect-'em-up, but the clever mechanics underpinning the deceptively simple layouts of *Spatter*'s bright stages produce a far more interesting challenge.**

As you might have guessed from the game's Japanese title, the player takes charge of a tricycle manned by the orange hooded Sanrin Sanchan, with your objective being to collect flowers that grow within a series of garden mazes. Naturally, this upsets the various gardeners whose hard toil you're making a mockery of and they soon try to stop your floral thievery by chasing you down using go-karts, helicopters and steamrollers. So far, so *Pac-Man*.

But, as mentioned, *Spatter* has fresh mechanics up its sleeves, specifically the imaginative defence mechanisms you're given to play with.

First up, you can ram into the side of the fences you cycle past, which would be pointless if not for the fact that they're elastic. Fences offer two possibilities: you can bend into them while a go-karting opponent on the other side is opposite you, which knocks them out of the maze, or you can leapfrog any foe on your side of the fence by riding into it and over them. Your second defence – breezeblocks that litter the maze – are optional in early rounds, but essential in later ones, as fences don't damage helicopter-piloting adversaries. Still, later levels feature indestructible steamrollers, but a carefully lobbed breezeblock can see off weaker enemies or block their progress.

Spatter also offers bonus rounds between stages where you pick fruit and deliver the flowers you've collected to Sanrin's girlfriend. On reaching her, you hold hands and bow, another of *Spatter*'s many idiosyncrasies. These might explain why it's unconverted, but don't make it any less worthy of a recommendation.





CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

RALLY-X 1991

Rally-X involves a vehicle-based maze chase and clearing its stages requires collecting all the items in the maze, so it's a pretty decent alternative to *Spatter*. Take the MSX version out for a spin.



» Innovative mechanics distinguish *Spatter* as more than a simple maze game. Flexible fences offer players creative ways of avoiding or shunting enemy vehicles.

» Quirky opponents are a Sega staple, and *Spatter* is no exception. The foes you first encounter ride go-karts and wear Sonic-blue hoods and goggles.

» People ranting about videogame violence should be shown Sanrin Sanchan innocently collecting flowers on his trusty tricycle. Don't mention the breezeblocks, though.

» *Spatter*'s look and feel can only be described as Sega-esque. Its vivid colour scheme, polished sprites and playful atmosphere are straight out of the Fantasy Zone.

BEST LEFT IN THE ARCADE

PIG NEWTON

■ **Developer:** Sega ■ **Year:** 1983 ■ **Genre:** Platformer

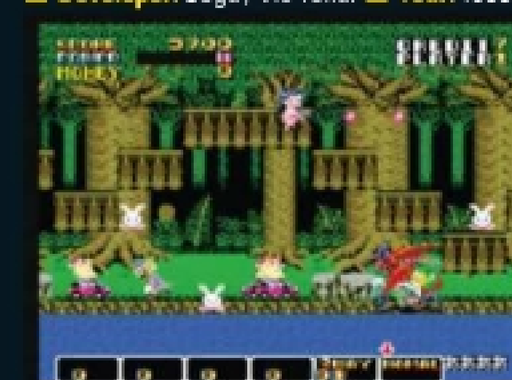
■ ***Pig Newton* was developed for Sega's G80 coin-op system, an interesting setup with raster and vector versions that allowed arcade operators to change the game in a compatible cabinet by swapping one CPU board for another.** In truth, the games produced for the vector variant are more fondly remembered than their sprite-based counterparts. This is a little unfair, as some G80 raster titles are decent games. *Pig Newton*, however, is a missed opportunity. Its gameplay and graphics are sound, but its unresponsive controls make navigating the main character an act of sheer masochism.

The aim is to collect bird eggs while dropping apples onto the heads of two hungry wolves trying to chop down the tree you're hiding in, but time after time the game's control set is left wanting. Cue cheap death after cheap death as you attempt to compensate for the eponymous Pig Newton's delayed and unpredictable reactions, followed by a chip tune 'Wah, Wah, Wah!' that rubs salt in the wound. It's a shame really, as with tighter controls the game could have been a lot of fun. As it stands, though, there would have been little demand for a home version.



UFO SENSHI YOHKO CHAN

■ **Developer:** Sega / Vic Tokai ■ **Year:** 1988 ■ **Genre:** Shoot-'em-up



» [Arcade] Cute visuals, hard core shooting and a clever blending of genres. What's not to love?

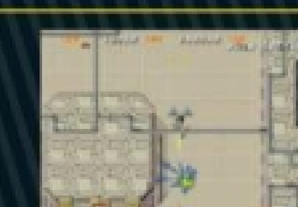
■ **Vic Tokai is perhaps better known for developing *Psycho Fox* and *Decap Attack* for the console market, but it also developed a handful of arcade titles, the majority of which were published by Sega.**

UFO Senshi Yohko Chan, or 'Extraterrestrial Soldier Yohko Chan' in English, is probably the best coin-op effort Vic Tokai produced and is by far the most original in terms of gameplay. The best way to explain the game is by saying it genre-hops. For instance, the opening stage takes place in a top-down maze where blasting invading extraterrestrials is rewarded with coins that allow you to buy upgrades in a shop. Aside from extra lives and time, more powerful firearms are on sale, with newly purchased weapons becoming selectable alternatives rather than replacements for your trusty laser pistol. Conversely, some later levels are side-scrolling platformers where dexterity and timing play as big a part in your survival as firepower. The reason the game remains unconverted, however, has probably as much to do with its uniquely Japanese flavour as its unusual blend of genres.

CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

ALIEN SYNDROME 1987

Admittedly, it's tough to find an equivalent of *UFO Senshi Youko-Chan* that was converted to home systems so, instead, get yourself Sega's widely ported maze-shooter *Alien Syndrome* and scrolling platformer *Wonder Boy* and then play one after the other.



CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

MERCS 1990

MERCS should clearly be your first port of call when seeking out a home-based alternative to *Desert Breaker*. As well as the Mega Drive version, *MERCS* was also ported to various home computers. Play the Mega Drive outing though, as it's absolutely fantastic fun.



DESERT BREAKER

■ **Developer:** Sega ■ **Year:** 1992 ■ **Genre:** Run-and-gun

■ **One glance at *Desert Breaker* tells you that it's Sega's take on Capcom's top-down shooter *MERCS*.** In fact, the similarities between the two games may go some way to explaining the rarity of the *Desert Breaker* coin-op. Sega's title certainly resembles *MERCS* enough to have made their lawyers nervous, and legal concerns likely influenced Sega's decision to license and port *MERCS* to the Mega Drive rather than converting *Desert Breaker*.

Inspiration and unconverted status aside, Sega's homage delivers on gameplay and does so while tweaking the tried and tested *MERCS* formula. One obvious change is that you can flee from overwhelming firefights by hitting a dash button, which grants a temporary speed boost and invulnerability. And as well as being able to upgrade your firearms to more destructive variants, you can also exchange your grenades for special weapons. More importantly, though, the game's countless enemies and imposing bosses provide a stiff and varied challenge, which is everything you want from a no-nonsense run-and-gun title.



» [Arcade] Is it *Mercs*? It certainly looks like Capcom's popular *Commando* sequel.

In the chair with...

COLIN PORCH

Colin Porch saw it all go wrong at Imagine Software and helped it go very right at Ocean. He tells Paul Drury about dungeons, dragons, vengeful wives and why he's still head over heels in love with making games

The archetypal games coder of the early Eighties may have been a scruffy teenager tapping away in his bedroom while his mum made his tea, but Colin Porch was into his thirties when he discovered the joys of videogames. He swapped a career in finance for creating games at some of Britain's best-known software houses. He was there when it all went pear-shaped at Imagine Software and then hopped across Liverpool to spend several years at Software Projects. His longest and most fruitful stint in the industry was with Ocean in Manchester, where he worked on such successful arcade conversions as *Gryzor* and *Operation Wolf* and brought the wonderful *Head Over Heels* to the C64, Atari ST and Amiga. Colin welcomed us into his Northamptonshire home, which has a trusty ST upstairs, but sadly no porch.

Would it be fair to say that you came to games programming later in life?
Well, at Ocean they used to call me 'Fossil' or 'Grandad'.

How rude.
I didn't mind… I mean, I was twice as old as most of them. I was 35 when I first used a computer. It was in the late Seventies and I bought a Radofin console, which was cheaper than an Atari. It had *Pong* and *Connect 4* on and games like that and, after a while, they released a 'Hobby Module'. The advertising just said, 'buy this, you can make your own games!' It sounded wonderful. I ordered one even though it was £85, which was a hefty amount in 1980.

What was it that convinced you to take the plunge?
I played the games on the console and just thought I could do better! It was a tiny little cartridge and had a DIN socket on the back where you could plug a tape recorder in. I found out very quickly I'd need to learn machine code to program it. It didn't even have an assembler. You had to work out the hex code and type in B6, A9 and so on.

It came with a keyboard then?
[laughs] No, you had to join the two joystick controllers together and use the buttons on them!

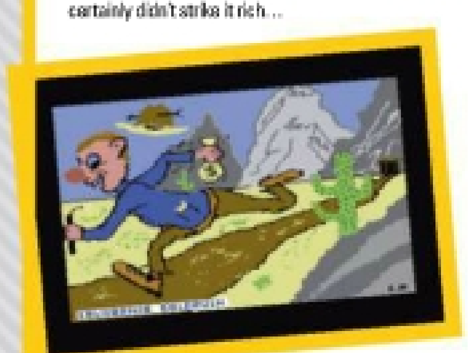
That sounds like hard work, Colin.
What was even worse was the instruction book it came with was full of errors. It had clearly been written in English by people who didn't speak English. I could've written a better one myself after a few months. But the processor was a Signetics 2650, and it's one of the best processors I've ever used… much better architecture than the 6502 I'd end up using on the Commodore 64!

Did you manage to write any games for the Radofin?
Yes, a few. The best one was *California Gold Rush*, which was like *Pac-Man* in reverse. I put these rectangles on screen and each contained a certain amount of cash. If you can complete a trail all the way round, you get the dosh, but these Indians are also patrolling the maze and if they come across your trail, they wipe it out and on later levels they can fire at you. There were sprites and sound effects… all squeezed into 4K of memory!

It sounds to us like quite a playable little game.
I did write to Radofin saying I'd made this game but never got a reply. Then I saw an ad in our local paper from a company called Anik wanting computer games. It was run by a guy called Richard Andrews in Northampton, which wasn't too far from me in Kettering, so I rang him up and said I hadn't got a commercial product – only a handful of people must have had the Radofin and the hobby module – but I was pretty confident I could convert it to another machine. He came over and saw it and told me Commodore was very accommodating to programmers wanting to make games for their machines but Atari wasn't helpful at all. So, for my birthday, my dad bought me a Commodore 64 not an Atari 800!

So you converted the game to the C64 and Anik distributed it?
That was the idea! Mr Andrews took a

» [C64] Colin's C64 debut was *California Gold Rush*, though he certainly didn't strike it rich…





"At Ocean, I was twice as old as most of the other programmers. They used to call me Fossil"

SELECTED TIMELINE

California Gold Rush (C64) 1983
Harvey Smith Showjumper (C64) 1985
Hunchback At The Olympics (C64) 1985
Dragon's Lair (C64) 1986
Operation Wolf (C64) 1987
Double Take (C64) 1987
Head Over Heels (C64) 1987
Gryzor (C64) 1988
Head Over Heels (ST) 1989
Caveman Games (Game Boy) Unreleased
Head Over Heels (Amiga) 1991
Parasol Stars (C64) Unreleased
Head Over Heels 2 (ST) TBC



» You're never too old to return to bedroom coding…

copy of the finished game and asked me if he could borrow my colour printer, which were like gold dust in the early Eighties, to start producing advertising materials. I said okay… and that was the last time I ever saw him. I tried to ring him, write to him and I even went to his house in Northampton but found it empty.

It sounds like you were gazumped like the gold prospectors of old… didn't that put you off the software industry a bit?
I saw it as a local rip-off. This would be 1983 and I'd just seen an advert for Imagine Software in Liverpool, who actually wanted to employ people. I went up to see them and showed Dave Lawson [joint founder of Imagine Software] *California Gold Rush*. He was quite impressed and he asked me if I'd taught myself. I said, 'We've all taught ourselves, haven't we?' He laughed and said, 'When can you start?'



» [C64] Colin created *Harvey Smith Showjumper* for the Commodore 64. His wife Janet helped out.

What project did Imagine assign you to?
Dave mentioned this 'universal programme'. The idea was it would be a framework you could put any game into. It'd have a beginning, a central hub where all the items in the game would be processed and a loop to handle things as they change in the game.

It sounds like a very early example of a 'development tool'.
Effectively that's what it was, and I did get it working. My understanding was that they'd taken on loads of staff because they had this deal with Marshall Cavendish to produce a game a month to be given away with a magazine they were publishing.

Of course! That's why they needed a tool to help produce games as quickly as possible.
Even with the tool, I don't think it was ever feasible. Simplistically, you might say if it takes one person six months to make a game, six people should take one month; but it doesn't work like that. They're falling over themselves, trying to use the same memory and variables…



» [C64] *Operation Wolf* was an impressive arcade conversion, winning awards and critical praise.



» [C64] Colin was working on *Dragon's Lair II* when he escaped Software Projects for Oceans new…

Did you have any involvement with *Bandersnatch* and *Psyclapse*, the infamous 'mega-games'?
I was friends with people like Jon Gibson and Eugene Evans, who were working on those videogames. They'd come and join in and see what the rest of us were doing but we weren't allowed access to their suite of offices. They became known as 'The A-Team'! I remember seeing them once, all sat on the floor, trying to link up these SAGE computers to share data. They never got it working though.

Colin, is that you, rubbing your eyes and shaking your head in despair about two minutes into the *Commercial Breaks* documentary that caught the dramatic implosion of Imagine Software on camera back in 1984?
[laughs] Yes, that's me, using a SAGE 4 linked to a Commodore 64. I was working on a game aimed at three to four-year-olds, getting them to match shapes and colours. I think Imagine thought they'd spotted a niche in the market for games for toddlers.

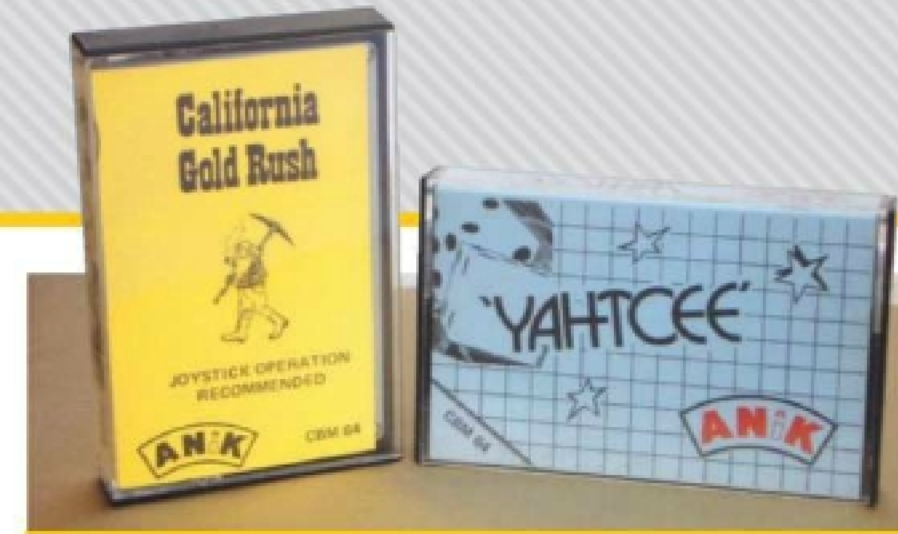
Imagine had many interesting ideas but it all went horribly wrong and ended in bankruptcy. When did you realise things were falling apart there?
The first indication was when my wages didn't go into the bank! I'd joined them in January 1984 and by May, problems were becoming apparent. I just taken out a mortgage and I thought I was going to lose my house!

Were you there when the bailiffs arrived at Imagine?
Yes, I was at work that day. I don't drink so I wasn't at the pub like most of the others. I used my own C64, two disk drives and a printer at Imagine and I had the dickens of a job convincing the bailiffs they were mine! They asked me for receipts and I said, 'come on, look at it, it's hardly state of the art stuff!' They took my word in the end. I left the building with all my equipment under my arms and that was that.

How did you end up working for Software Projects?

There was an advert in the *Liverpool Echo* and about 20 of us applied from Imagine for two jobs. It was a lot smaller operation but they took four of us on, maybe out of pity. I was interviewed by Alan Maton and Tommy Barton [co-founders of Software Projects with Matthew Smith] and I think I got a job because I'd actually got some completed projects under my belt. Not everyone from Imagine had…

Did you see very much of Matthew Smith back then?
He'd come into the office, but not very often. I never saw him working on a game, just on things that interested him from an academic point of view but with no practical application. He spent weeks writing a programme that had little grains of sand, or maybe it was snow, falling from the top of the screen, collecting at the bottom. That was it.



» Colin's *California Gold Rush* and his brother Frank's *Yahtcee*, both for the C64, were released through Anik. Neither of them received a penny for their work.

> " Dave Lawson at Imagine Software asked me if I'd taught myself to code. I said, 'we've all taught ourselves, haven't we?' "

Your first game for them was *Harvey Smith Showjumper*. Erm, show jumping isn't a sport that you would normally associate with videogames…
It was Tommy Barton's idea. I just said, 'Do you think a show jumping game will sell?' He said, 'Yeah, if we put the right spin on it.' The whole concept was mine after that, how the game looked and worked. The horse was done by my wife Janet. She used the famous sequence of photos taken by Muybridge [circa 1872] to show a horse galloping. Effectively, those pictures were turned into pixels. It was painstaking work!

Having a household name like Harvey Smith on the cover must have helped publicise the game.
Actually, the week before it was released, Harvey Smith walked off with someone else's wife and that was big news back then! Suddenly, we got word that Boots, WHSmith and an enormous number of high street shops wouldn't stock our game! That had to affect sales.

We bet you felt like giving Harvey one of his own trademark two-fingered salutes. Did you have better luck with your involvement with *Dragon's Lair*?
We had an actual arcade machine in a corridor in the Software Projects offices. We'd play some and then talk about how to do it on the Commodore 64. There had to be compromises, obviously. I'd be pacing up and down in the office in the early hours of the morning sometimes, thinking of what to do…

The original *Dragon's Lair* for the Commodore 64 was largely a port of the Coleco Adam version, but it looks like you had more of a free hand to develop your own levels for the sequel, *Escape From Singe's Castle*.
Both games were a group effort. For the first *Dragon's Lair*, I produced the primitive sound driver and some of the tunes, and worked on coding a couple of the levels in conjunction with John Darnell. Certainly, most of the coding was his. We developed this technique so while you were playing one section, the next one was loading into memory. For the sequel, I remember designing the opening 'rapids' level. I had the problem of making Dirk 'disappear' as he went over each level of water to reappear, smaller, on a lower level… it's not as simple as it sounds!

You left Software Projects before *Dragon's Lair II* was released. What happened there?
I had a disagreement with Tommy Barton over a Christmas bonus, which he promised and then never paid me. I went back after Christmas – this would be 1987 – and was working on *Singe's Castle* when I got a call from Colin Stokes from Ocean who I knew from Imagine days. He offered me a lot more money and he said they'd pay the commuting costs from Liverpool to Manchester, so I said I'd love to join them. Tommy was not happy. He refused to pay me the holiday money I was due, so I

✱ YOU ASK THE QUESTIONS

We quizzed Colin in his Northamptonshire home with your questions and he duly responded between bouts of coding on his Atari ST…

Northway: Was it easy to convert *Head Over Heels* from one CPU architecture to another?
No, it was very tricky. Jon Ritman's code was tremendously well commented so I knew in English what it was supposed to do but I didn't understand the mechanics of how it worked! But that didn't matter as long as my routines did the same thing. We'd feed data in and if it came out the same for mine as it did his, we'd cracked it! I was on the phone a lot to Jon if I had a problem and he'd help me as much as he could.

Merman: Was there a lot of code sharing among the in-house team at Ocean?
Apart from people working on the same project, not really. We didn't tend to do that, though I think Paul Hughes got his hands on stuff! I don't think it was a matter of rivalry, it was just, 'this is what we're working on, that's what you're working on'. We'd frequently discuss methodology of how to get a particular effect working, though. Like that anti-scrolling device I used for *Operation Wolf* – I was happy to share that with whoever wanted to use it.

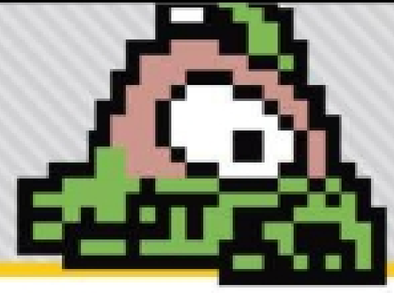
Mayhem: How difficult was it getting *Operation Wolf* into a single load rather than a multi-load?
We used quite a lot of compression techniques. A lot of picture data, believe it or not, consists of zeroes. If you've got a stretch of ground the same colour, you can just say 'I want this colour forty times!' It was a challenge, but it was something we knew we had to do right from the start.

FGasking: Was your brother Frank Porch a programmer too?
Yes, he wrote a game called *Yahtcee* in BASIC for Anik, the same company I did *California Gold Rush* for, and with the same result. We never got a penny from them!

DRS: Was programming on the Game Boy very different to the C64?
They had similar processors but I thought the Game Boy was a really awful machine to work with. To keep the costs down, Nintendo had used the same registers or processors, call them what you like, to do different things at different times during its cycle. One processor might be responsible for updating graphics and the same one would do something with the sound but at a different time in its refresh cycle. If you tried to change one when it was handling the other, it just collapsed.



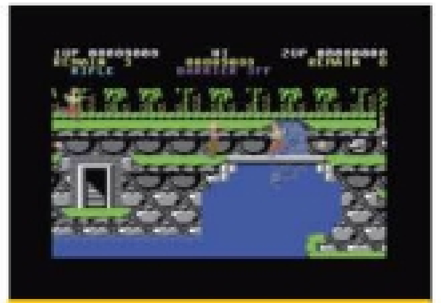
» Colin has kept the development disks from his Ocean days – here we have *Gryzor* and *Operation Wolf*.



kept the disk with the game I was working on as insurance till they paid up. Tommy had the police sent to my house saying I'd stolen his property. I rang Colin saying I had a problem and he said, give them the disk back and we'll pay the holiday money he owes you. And off I went to the dungeons of Ocean in Manchester!

Those dungeons are famed for 'arcade alley', which housed the original arcade cabinets Ocean were converting for home computers. Is that where you were told you would be handling C64 versions of *Gryzor* and *Operation Wolf*?
At Ocean, they always let you see the game and asked you if you thought you could do it. I knew the technical limitations of the C64 inside out but I was hopeless at games that need fast reactions, so I'd get people like Lee Cowley to play it so I could decide whether I thought it was feasible!

You collaborated with David Blake on both of those games. Was it a good working relationship?
He was far younger than me and we were good friends most of the time but we did have umpteen arguments about technical stuff. Ocean had their own tokenised assembler which they'd produced that gave you extra instructions and David would gaily use these even though I kept telling him we didn't need them and they used up extra memory and execution time!



» [C64] If *Gryzor* wasn't hard enough, you needed nimble toes as well as fingers to play it…

It ended up like a teacher-student relationship and that's not what either of us wanted.

We really like your conversion of *Gryzor*, except for the fact that you jump by pressing the space bar. We have to play it with one of our bare feet on the keyboard, which isn't pretty.
[smiles wryly] We tried all sorts of things. We even considered taking the controls off the joystick all together and just using the keyboard, but that wasn't popular. We needed another button and we just didn't have one in those days – the space bar is the biggest thing. It wasn't ideal but what else could we do?

When you saw the huge plastic machine gun on the front of the *Operation Wolf* cabinet, you must have thought, 'How the hell are we going to do *that* on the C64'?
[laughs] There was talk about using a lightgun because they were available then, but they weren't very accurate. You had to have a whacking great target on screen, not a little individual soldier. Eventually we came up with the crosshair sight you controlled with the joystick.

How did you manage to scroll only a small portion of the screen so that it maintained an authentic arcade look?
I got more communication from punters at the time over that than anything else! Everyone knew the C64 had this wonderfully smooth pixel by pixel scrolling but you had to scroll the whole screen. We took all the characters that made up the ammunition data on the right of the screen – the bombs and bullets and so on – and 'anti scrolled' them, manipulating their data in the opposite direction to the main screen. It appears that one part of the screen is scrolling and another is standing still. Where the two parts of the screen met, there was a hell of a mess so we had the 'energy sprite', a single sprite multiplexed down the screen. It covered the join!

That's ingenious coding, Colin.
Everyone wanted to know how we'd interrupted the Commodore's scrolling mechanism! I was happy to share the trick, though Gary Bracey at Ocean said we should keep it to ourselves!

You took on a different type of conversion work with *Double Take*, converting it from the Spectrum to the C64.
I didn't really want to do it. In my mind, there was very little that grabbed you and made you want to come back to it. I was given the concept but no code. We had a team of graphic designers who would design the screen and my job was to animate and control the objects they gave me. I just didn't think the gameplay was there.

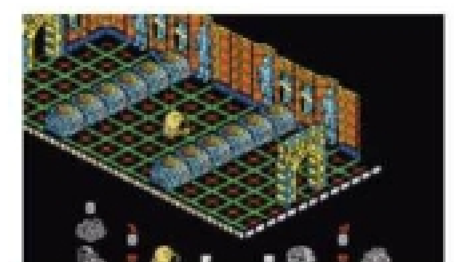


» Colin shares his plans for *Head Over Heels 2*. See, you really can buy isometric paper…

It sounds like you had more fun converting *Head Over Heels*.
Ocean showed me the game on an Amstrad and said, Jon Ritman [author of *Head Over Heels*] doesn't think you can do it! I have every respect for Jon, we're good friends, but I just think he was very aware of the speed restrictions inherent in the Commodore. I only found out years later that the version I did on the 64 and subsequently on the ST were different to the Spectrum version because he'd deliberately taken out some rooms that he was sure would be too long to process!

Did Jon offer you a lot of assistance with the task?

He came and saw me at Ocean, told me how the game worked, drew me some diagrams and gave me a listing of the Z80 code – I'm not a Z80 coder but I could follow what it was doing. It simply became a matter of making my routines do what his routines were doing. The maths involved was not trivial, I'll tell you!



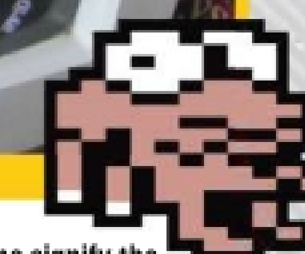
» [Atari ST] *Head Over Heels*: Colin coded the 16-bit conversions in his spare time.

We imagine it could be very stressful… is it true you had a heart attack while working on the game?
I have a genetic condition, known as SVT, that affects my heart rate and it can cause me to pass out, which did happen a time or two at Ocean. It's not a heart attack but I know it's frightening to the people around me. I don't think stress helps but I did really enjoy my job at Ocean!

As the Nineties dawned, things must have changed at Ocean…
I got a call from Gary Bracey in 1991, effectively saying the home computer market was coming to an end but did I want to take on *Parasol Stars* for the C64 on a freelance basis? I knew they'd offered it to someone else who'd turned it down saying it couldn't be done, and I looked at it and said, 'well, I'm not sure but I'll have a go!' They gave me a handsome advance and I went home and gave it my best. It was shaping up pretty nicely so I showed it to Ocean and they thought it was worth pursuing. Two months later, I came home one afternoon and saw our vacuum cleaner in the middle of the front room and all my work disks underneath it. Some had actually been broken. My wife wasn't there so I started looking round the house and found her wardrobe empty.



» *Head Over Heels 2* for the ST is shaping up nicely.



Ah, is this the burglary we remember reading about in the videogame press at the time?
I never told Ocean that! No, my wife was an alcoholic and when she'd been drinking, she was a different person. She'd run off to Scotland with her ex-husband. When I did eventually get in touch with her I said, 'you didn't do me any favours destroying those disks, I'm out of work now…'

Couldn't you have re-coded the game following the incident?
Yes, I still had the disk I'd shown Ocean two months earlier but they couldn't afford the time it would take me to catch up to where I'd got to and I think they were still unsure whether a C64 version was really feasible. Ocean were very sympathetic and didn't ask for any of their money back.

Did that misfortune signify the end of your involvement with videogames programming?
It was until last year, when I went to the Ocean reunion at Play Expo in Manchester. Back in 1989, I'd started to write my own sequel to *Head Over Heels* for the Atari ST, designing my own rooms and puzzles, and Gary Bracey asked whatever happened to it. I said the code and the Atari were gathering dust in my garage and he told me I should finish it! I've written this editor to help me create rooms and I've bought some isometric paper. Yes, you really can buy it! The game's a long way from completion but it's playable. Frank Gasking gave me Jon Ritman's email so I got in touch and he sent back this reply saying, 'f*** me sideways, I was only talking about you the other day! Give me a ring!' We had a long chat and, though he thinks Atari still own the rights, he's given me his blessing.

So you're back to bedroom coding 30 years after you first started.
Oh yes, it takes me back. I'm pacing up and down, thinking how to solve problems. The buzz is still there. The feeling of creativity, of producing something the way you want it to be, trying to get a piece of equipment to perform to your will… it's super!



Thanks to Colin and his wife Amy for their hospitality and to his brother Frank for the Anik games photograph.

* FIVE TO PLAY

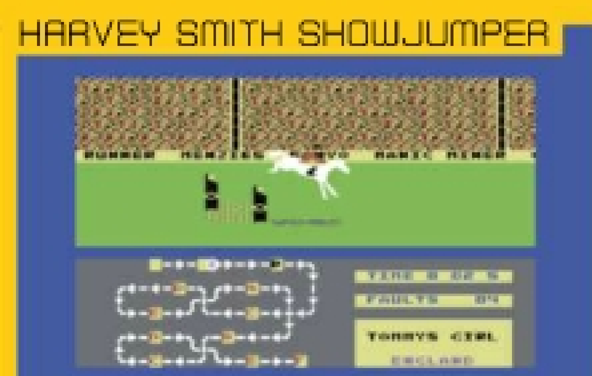
The best releases from Colin's back catalogue

DRAGON'S LAIR II: ESCAPE FROM SINGE'S CASTLE



ADAPTING THE GROUND-BREAKING laserdisc arcade game to home micros was a doubly difficult challenge. You couldn't hope to replicate the graphical magic of *Dragon's Lair* on an 8-bit machine and, without those distracting visuals, the shallow gameplay is left cruelly exposed. Credit to Software Projects for interpreting some key scenes from the original machine and producing this surprisingly playable sequel, which scored a commendable 90 per cent in *Zzap!* issue 22 and is a considerable improvement on their first home conversion. Colin's rapids level is a cracking opener, though due to his acrimonious departure from Software Projects, his name was removed from the game's credits. We asked Colin whether this annoyed him. "Am I bovvered?" was his reply.

HARVEY SMITH SHOWJUMPER



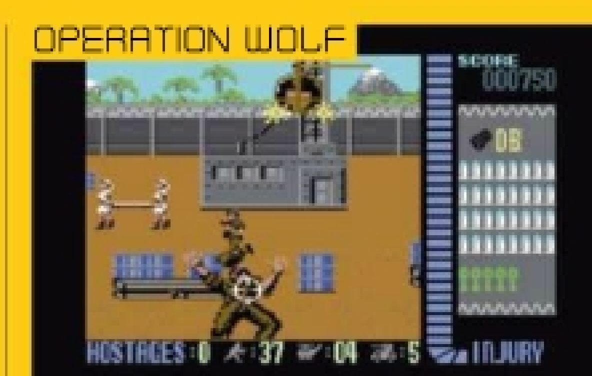
IT MAY NOT often be associated with videogames, but Colin managed to create an interesting take on the sport of jodhpurs-wearing Royals, especially if played with a group of riders. The 12 courses on offer can be supplemented through a handy course editor, allowing equestrian-leaning gamers to design their own series of fences – a pretty forward-thinking idea back in 1985. The horse gallops and canters with impressive grace and made a second appearance in *Kane*, written by Colin's coding buddy, John Darnell. Also note the in-game advertising hoardings, which include a plug for *Lode Runner*, one of Colin's all-time favourite games – he began work on an Amstrad conversion of the game just before his departure from Software Projects.

GRYZOR



YOU MAY KNOW it as *Contra*, but whatever you call this venerable run-and-gunner, you should be suitably impressed by this arcade conversion. Battling your way through dense jungle and infiltrating the enemy base is a stern challenge, made even more demanding by having to use the space bar to jump. Most gamers opted to use their feet, though we've often ended up using our foreheads, such is the frustrating difficulty of the game. Still, if you're up to the task, there's much to enjoy in the blasting and bullet-dodging. Collecting power-ups and new weapons keeps things interesting and, considering the fact that Colin wasn't an arcade gamer, this does a fine job of capturing the spirit of the original cab.

OPERATION WOLF



CONVERTING ANY ARCADE coin-op hit to humble home micros can be a serious challenge, but when the original has an Uzi 9mm bolted onto its control panel you know you're really up against it. Having initially contemplated using a lightgun peripheral, Colin and his fellow coder David Blake decided to use a joystick-guided crosshair to control your gunfire – it works far better than might be expected. The ingenious 'anti-scrolling' technique that Colin developed allowed the conversion to maintain the look and feel of the original machine and it's one of Ocean's most successful arcade ports. *Zzap!* made it a Sizzler in issue 45, it picked up a Golden Joystick award and is definitely still worth a blast today.

HEAD OVER HEELS



OF ALL THE games Colin worked on in the Eighties and early Nineties, this is the one he's most proud of. A sterling conversion of Jon Ritman and Bernie Drummond's excellent isometric adventure, this earned a Gold Medal from *Zzap!*, scoring a whopping 98 per cent – the joint highest in the magazine's history. Colin was so taken with the game, he actually produced the ST and Amiga versions at home in his spare time and then sold them to Ocean on a freelance basis. He's not finished with *Head Over Heels* just yet, either. He's currently revisiting a sequel he began work on in 1989 and, having played a 'work in progress' on Colin's trusty ST, we can happily report that it's looking rather lovely.

08/12

Rage Racer

MAKING THE GRADIENT

» RETROREVIVAL

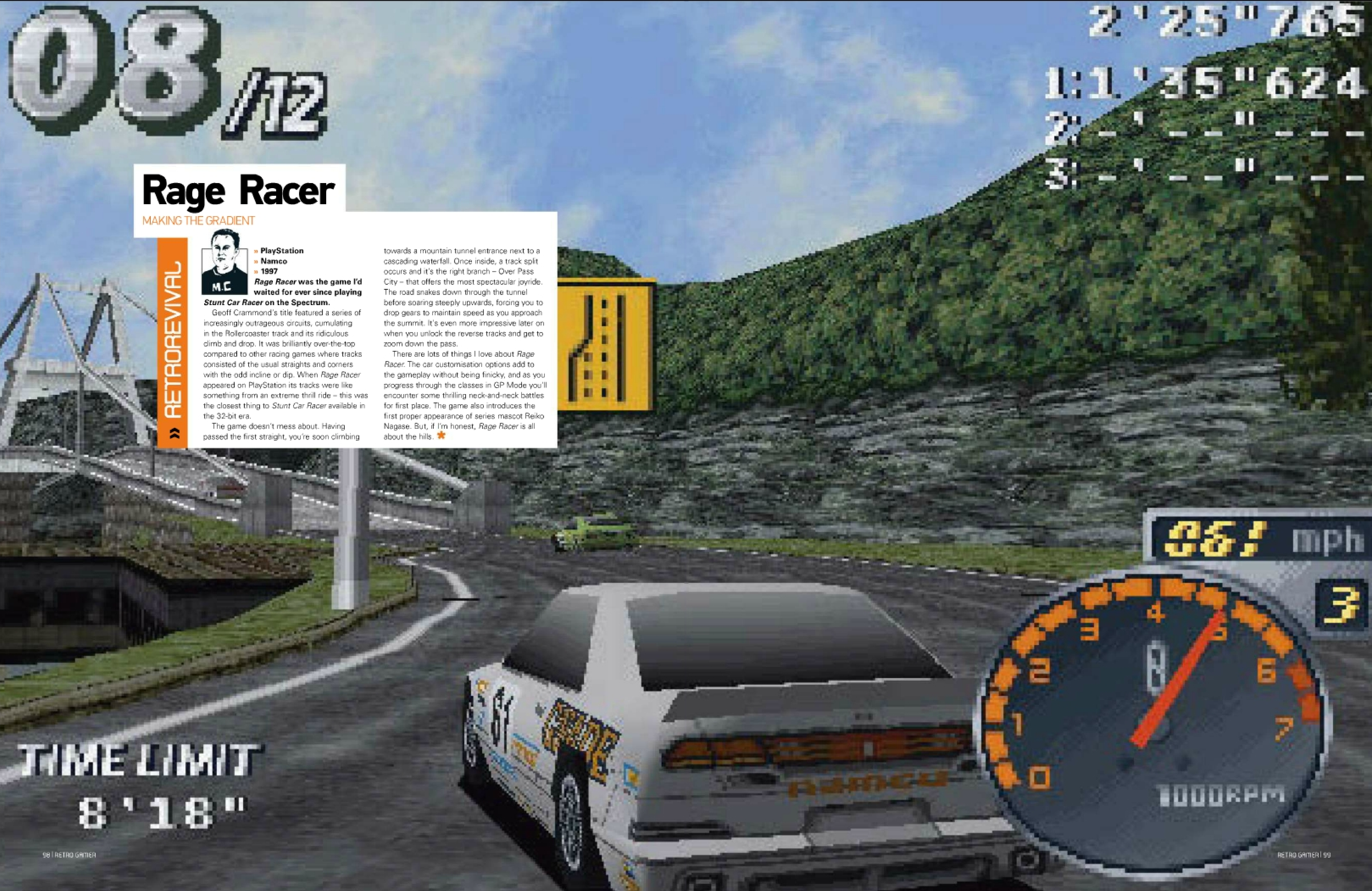
» PlayStation
» Namco
» 1997

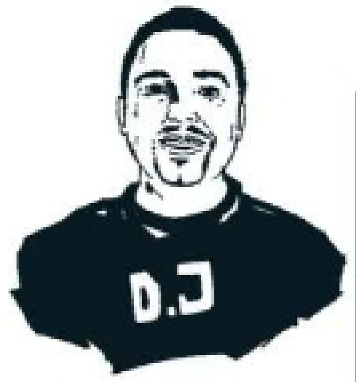
***Rage Racer* was the game I'd waited for ever since playing *Stunt Car Racer* on the Spectrum.**

Geoff Crammond's title featured a series of increasingly outrageous circuits, cumulating in the Rollercoaster track and its ridiculous climb and drop. It was brilliantly over-the-top compared to other racing games where tracks consisted of the usual straights and corners with the odd incline or dip. When *Rage Racer* appeared on PlayStation its tracks were like something from an extreme thrill ride – this was the closest thing to *Stunt Car Racer* available in the 32-bit era.

The game doesn't mess about. Having passed the first straight, you're soon climbing towards a mountain tunnel entrance next to a cascading waterfall. Once inside, a track split occurs and it's the right branch – Over Pass City – that offers the most spectacular joyride. The road snakes down through the tunnel before soaring steeply upwards, forcing you to drop gears to maintain speed as you approach the summit. It's even more impressive later on when you unlock the reverse tracks and get to zoom down the pass.

There are lots of things I love about *Rage Racer*. The car customisation options add to the gameplay without being finicky, and as you progress through the classes in GP Mode you'll encounter some thrilling neck-and-neck battles for first place. The game also introduces the first proper appearance of series mascot Reiko Nagase. But, if I'm honest, *Rage Racer* is all about the hills. ✱

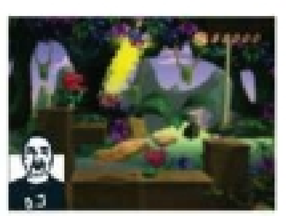




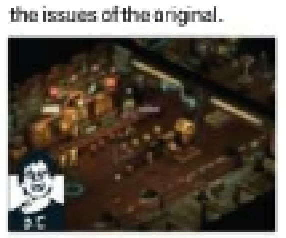
>> It's been a bit of a quiet month, so we've decided to mainly focus on the rather triumphant return of Shadowrun. We also take a gander at Capcom's remake of DuckTales, Ubisoft's Flashback update and the PC version of Castlevania: Lords Of Shadow



✱ PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN
DuckTales Remastered
An enjoyable remake from WayForward that looks beautiful and corrects many of the issues of the original.



DAVID
Shadowrun Returns
It has been a long time, but the wait for *Shadowrun Returns* is certainly worth it. A great Kickstarter success story.



» [PC] Seattle in *Shadowrun Returns* is so detailed. It seems a shame that it's not all interconnected for extended exploration.

Shadowrun Returns

NEVER, EVER, CUT A DEAL WITH A DRAGON

INFORMATION
- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** PC
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** iOS, ANDROID
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** £14.99
- » **PUBLISHER:** HAREBRAINED SCHEMES
- » **DEVELOPER:** HAREBRAINED SCHEMES
- » **PLAYERS:** 1

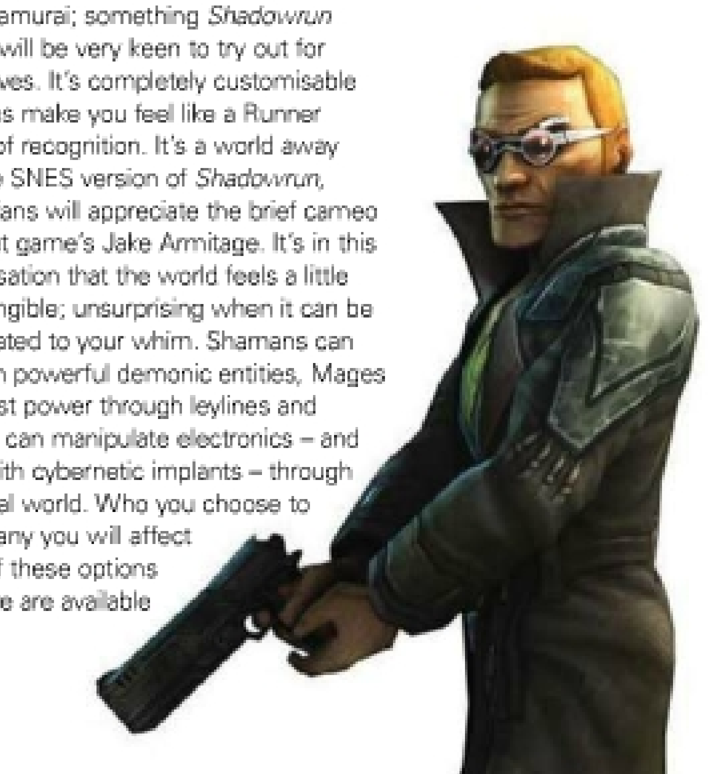
It's probably best to start with a warning. *Shadowrun Returns* isn't much like the videogames you remember, at least on a technical level. Where both the SNES and Mega Drive equivalents opted for a more real-time oriented form of RPG combat, *Shadowrun Returns* favours turn-based – more akin to the rules of the tabletop version that spawned the series in the first place.

But that's a minor aside, because everything you could hope for from a *Shadowrun* game is here, something that pleases us greatly. This dystopian cyberpunk world is as rich as it ever was, and the efforts made to immerse you in it are fantastic; it's living proof that you don't need voice acting, impressive lip-syncing or CGI cut-scenes to create a world that you want to explore. This is thanks to the quality of writing, which manages to flesh out a character before they even start speaking. Outside of the short descriptions that lead you in, however, it's the dialogue system that helps you craft a sense of your own character too. Picking one option over another doesn't necessary restrict or benefit you in any way, but it sure as hell makes you feel a little more attached to what could have been a just as easily have been a one-dimensional script.

The underlying levelling-up system benefits from similar personal choices too. You've a host of races and classes available to you from the start, and while you may pick Mage from the beginning you could end up more akin to a sword-wielding Street Samurai; something *Shadowrun* experts will be very keen to try out for themselves. It's completely customisable and helps make you feel like a Runner worthy of recognition. It's a world away from the SNES version of *Shadowrun*, though fans will appreciate the brief cameo from that game's Jake Armitage. It's in this customisation that the world feels a little more tangible; unsurprising when it can be manipulated to your whim. Shamans can summon powerful demonic entities, Mages can boost power through leylines and Deckers can manipulate electronics – and those with cybernetic implants – through the digital world. Who you choose to accompany you will affect which of these options and more are available to you, again tying into a game based on your choices.

» [PC] Combat can happen at any time when interacting with NPCs, you need to be ready for it.







Similar games you must play



Final Fantasy Tactics (1997)
Though *Tactics Ogre* was the game to introduce mechanics of strategy RPGs that we know and love these days, it was *Final Fantasy Tactics* that popularised it – unsurprising with the clout that the name *Final Fantasy* had during the PlayStation era. Nonetheless, it's as great now as it was then – though you may want to opt for the PSP revamp.



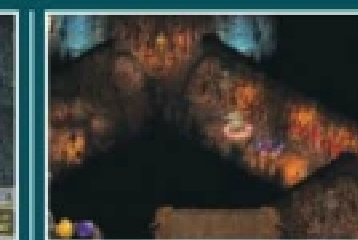
Ogre Battle: The March Of The Black Queen (1993)
This unique blend of strategy and RPG hasn't been matched since. It received limited popularity in the West when it came out on the SNES, but the depth of its combat system is worth your time alone. Luckily, it is available on the Virtual Console, giving you a chance to play this gripping SRPG.



XCOM: Enemy Unknown (2012)
Another classic franchise had a modern revitalisation recently, as *XCOM: Enemy Unknown* reminded us that the masochist in us just loves it when everything that *can* go wrong, *does* go wrong. More strategy than RPG, it is nonetheless a game that you need to play – if only to support those brilliant minds at Firaxis.



Fallout (1997)
A completely different form of dystopia, *Fallout* popularised post-apocalyptic games but shares a level of similarity with *Shadowrun* thanks to its depth of writing, its world and its combat. Its predecessor, *Wasteland*, even took to Kickstarter for a sequel headed up by Brian Fargo himself. It's become extremely popular again due to the superb *Fallout 3*.



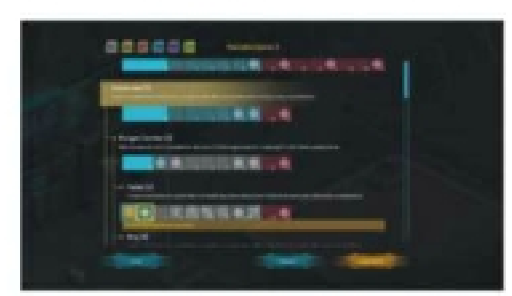
Inquisitor (2009)
This was first released in 2009 but took three years to translate into English. A classic take on isometric RPGs, this is more fantasy than *Shadowrun*'s world but an intriguing one all the same. Filled to the brim with demons, dragons and other beasties, it's pre-*Diablo* after *Diablo* and all the glorious retro gaming goodness that comes with it.

Combat itself is pretty tricky, especially earlier on. Don't expect to steamroll groups of Gangers and Corp bodies until you've levelled up a good deal and equipped the gear to go with it. Thankfully it's not too complex to comprehend; each character gets two actions a turn – whether moving, shooting, reloading or what have you – and after that it's the enemies' turn. The key is sensible movement and protection, a similar system to last year's *XCOM: Enemy Unknown*. Certain environmental objects can provide either basic or full protection, while sensible manipulation of pillars and walls will block the line of sight of potential attackers.

Where *Shadowrun Returns* does differ from *XCOM* is in its exploration, and it's here that it resembles its retro predecessors much more. Each environment – though often quite vast – is a separate instance in itself, built with side quests, incidental characters to chat with and short battles to encounter. It helps, then, that the art style for *Shadowrun Returns* is spot-on, an outstanding upgrade for anyone raised on the isometric glory of the SNES version. There's plenty of detail throughout each environment, whether dilapidated BTL dens (a futuristic chip that plagues minds in much the same way as drugs) or fancy corporate lobbies and office structures. Your Shadow Runner will experience them all, and Harebrained Schemes has done a bang-up job of creating a world filled with peripheral goodies to explore. It's just a shame that many of these places are little more than passing visits, since in most cases you'll be shipped off to whatever location you're next needed at. It does feel like this new *Shadowrun* would've been better suited to being more open, as its SNES and Mega Drive versions were, to keep that sense of place throughout your experience. It's a minor distraction, perhaps, but a notable one for fans of the originals.

Sadly, the story of *Shadowrun Returns* isn't quite as grand as we'd have hoped either. Though its writing is exceptional, the tale itself is lacking somewhat. You'll be tasked with identifying the cause of an old friend's demise in the hopes of claiming 100,000 Nuyen (*Shadowrun*'s currency). This will intertwine with a number of related events, primary among them being an unusual string of murders. It's intriguing, that much is true, but with a world as rich as *Shadowrun Returns* it feels like a bit of a shame for it to fall on such an important hurdle.

But then, this is just the beginning for *Shadowrun Returns*. Released alongside the game is the very same editor used to build the main campaign and, while more campaigns are planned by Harebrained Schemes as DLC, it's here that we should be excited. Fans will be free to craft their own stories, and someone has already begun rebuilding the entire SNES original. It's in the Steam Workshop support that *Shadowrun Returns* really begins to shine.



» [PC] Your manor doubles as a skill tree, allowing you to unlock more skills and classes, providing you have enough money…



» [PC] Combat is simultaneously simple to understand and challenging to master. Just the way it should be.

» [PC] This is taken from the user creation *Shadowrun Reboot*, and is pretty impressive. This will be one to keep an eye on.



BRIEF HISTORY

» Before it found success on the SNES, *Shadowrun* was a popular pen and paper RPG. It eventually received a number of follow up games that were all markedly different to each other. The biggest change was FASA Studio's massive fumble on Xbox 360 and PC, where it turned its popular RPG into a bland FPS.

✱ WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
SHADOWRUN (SNES)



▼ SOMETHING NEW
FIRE EMBLEM: AWAKENING (3DS)



In a nutshell

It's a short campaign, but this remains a must play, thanks to solid combat mechanics, brilliant writing and a bright future with the in-game editor.

Adam Barnes

>> Score **85%**

RETRO ROUND-UP

>> Every month we look at all the classics and latest releases that are available to buy or download



DOWNLOAD OF THE MONTH



INFORMATION

» **System:** SNES
» **Buy it for:** £6.99
» **Buy it from:** Virtual Console (Wii U)
» **Score:** 92%

Earthbound

Originally released on the SNES in 1994 (with a US release in 1995) *Earthbound* is one of the few SNES RPGs to not receive a European localisation. As a result it now reaches insanely high prices on eBay, with a fully completed game leaving little change from £400. Thank goodness, then, that Nintendo has finally released this quirky RPG on Virtual Console, allowing a new generation of gamers to find out if it really is worth all that fuss.

The first thing that strikes you about *Earthbound* is its sheer cuteness. There's a delightful style to the visuals that makes it completely different to other SNES RPGs of the time and still makes it stand out today. The soundtrack is of a similar standard, composed (for the most part) of cheerful, breezy tunes that perfectly suit the onscreen shenanigans.

There's more to *Earthbound* than nice aesthetics however, and it really shines when it comes to gameplay and combat. It's certainly challenging – perhaps a little too challenging at first – but as your party grows, the difficulty does get better; even if hero Ness is a lot stronger than his companions.

There are no random encounters in *Earthbound*, allowing you to move away from the dull grinding found in many similar RPGs. The combat is also sound, with a character's health shown on a rotating dial that slowly counts down to zero, giving you the chance to heal a character before they die. There's even the option to let the AI fight for you. They're neat mechanics in a game filled with neat ideas, and really help *Earthbound* stand apart from its peers. *Earthbound*'s story also feels different to the norm, being packed with cultural references, aliens and other oddities, while your party consists of a group of kids that are a world away from the typical stereotypes found within the genre.

Earthbound certainly isn't perfect – due to its steep learning curve – but get past that and you'll discover a timeless classic that really has matured with age.

>> OTHER HIGHLIGHTS



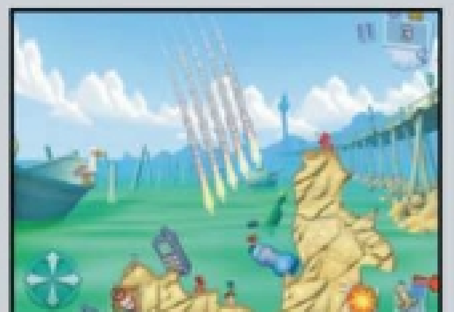
DuckTales Remastered

» **System:** PC (tested), PS3, Xbox 360, Wii U
» **Buy it for:** £11.99
» **Buy it from:** Online/retail
» **Score:** 75%
» You can't fault *DuckTales*'s aesthetics. Crammed with stunning animation and featuring the voice talent of the original cartoon cast, it's a polished update that will leave fans delighted. It's a pity, then, that the controls haven't been giving the same amount of polish, making the game disjointed on occasion. It's fun though, and while the later difficulty levels will make you wince, the sheer love poured into *DuckTales* will keep you playing.



Castlevania: Lords Of Shadow Ultimate Edition

» **System:** PC
» **Buy it for:** £19.99
» **Buy it from:** Online/retail
» **Score:** 90%
» This impressive PC port will certainly tide us over until the sequel is released in February next year. Combat feels much better than before thanks to the optimised 60 fps framerate that allows the combat engine to shine. The numerous extras add massively to an already big game, while the included DLC greatly enhances the story. A highly impressive conversion.



Worms 3

» **System:** iOS
» **Buy it for:** £2.99
» **Buy it from:** App Store
» **Score:** 87%
» You have to hand it to Team 17. Nearly 20 years after its initial release, the studio is still finding plenty of inventive ways to milk its lucrative franchise. This latest instalment is a good one, featuring worms with different abilities, the introduction of cards that can affect your worms or the playing field and a fun Survival mode. The AI is a little weak at times, but it comes alive (as usual) in multiplayer.



Pac-Man Dash

» **System:** iOS (tested), Android
» **Buy it for:** Free (in-app purchases)
» **Buy it from:** App Store/Google Play
» **Score:** 58%
» Pac-Man's latest game is a fun endless runner that sees him gobbling ghosts, fruit and cookies while completing a variety of different missions. Although fun, Namco has selfishly limited the amount of times you can play, meaning you either have to wait around for silly amounts of time or stump up cash for the privilege. Ignore this cynical cash grab and stick with the better-balanced *Sonic Dash* instead.



Flashback

» **System:** Xbox 360 » **Buy it for:** 1200 points » **Buy it from:** Xbox Live Arcade » **Score:** 56%

We had high hopes for *Flashback*, but somewhere along the way it's been awkwardly fumbled. Conrad B Hart has been turned into an annoying cliché, spouting out crap like "awesome source" while the controls never feel as precise as they need to be, making for some awkward jumping and shooting.

It nicely expands upon the events of the original game, but often feels half-hearted, with new additions like 3D goggles and an XP system often feeling undercooked. Even having the original game included feels underwhelming due to it being stuck into an unrealistic arcade cabinet, greatly reducing its playing area for no reason. The intentions are certainly noble, but this new *Flashback* is a missed opportunity.



HOMEBREW

>> The scene's latest news and reviews



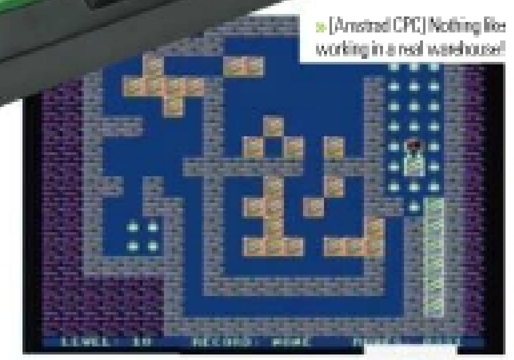
After spending a fair bit of time with the Amstrad 16K ROM entries, I've realised just how much I like games programming competitions; the only 'problem' they present when it comes to writing reviews is that, with all of those new releases, I usually can't cover absolutely everything I'd like to here. *Hopefully* the solution I've gone for this time works so it can be used for future ABBUC, RGCD 16K or MSXdev events

NEW GAMES NEEDED

If you have a homebrew project you would like to see featured then please contact us at:
retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk


» [Amstrad CPC] Do they ever stop?!




» [Amstrad CPC] Nothing like working in a real warehouse!



AMSTRAD CPC 16K ROM COMPETITION

FOUR OF THE BEST FOR THE AMSTRAD CPC



FORMAT: AMSTRAD CPC
DEVELOPER: VARIOUS
LINK: WWW.KIKSTART.EU/CPC-16K-2013
RELEASE: 2013
PRICE: FREE
REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

The Amstrad CPC 16K ROM Game Development Competition ran on the CPC Wiki website between January and June 2013 and, as the name probably suggests, all prospective entrants were required to cram their game into a mere 16K during that six month period. Although that doesn't *sound* like a lot, in the right hands there's enough room in 16,384 bytes to produce a solid game, which is demonstrated by the two puzzlers and two action games that were released before the deadline.

To start with there's *Overkoban*, which is an implementation of the classic warehouse-based puzzle *Sokoban* where the objective is to take the crates dotted around an unusually shaped warehouse floor and, without getting any irreversibly stuck against walls, push all of them to the marked storage areas. The classic *Sokoban* levels have been used so the difficulty is high straight from the first floor, but there are no time or move limits to worry about so players have quite a bit of thinking time to work out a way to beat the stage and how to optimise their strategy for the lowest number of moves.

The second puzzler isn't as sedately paced; *Subtera Puzlo* sees the player take control of a cute looking insect that must be guided around to collect coins and a key in each stage in order to progress. To make things a little trickier, there are one-way doors and slippery tiles that limit how the insect can move and some of the stages have static traps and mobile enemies to avoid as well. Ticking away inexorably in the background is a time limit, so pausing too long for thought isn't advised.

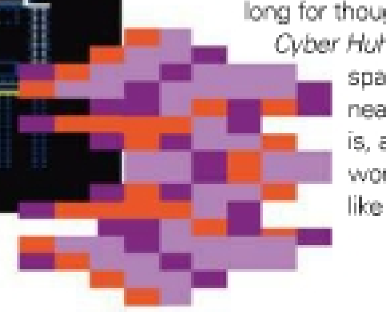
Cyber Huhn is a first-person space shooter set in the near future where mankind is, after harvesting an alien world of giant chicken-like creatures almost to extinction, now forced to defend itself from the poultry uprising. Squadrons of space-suited avians flap their way past the sights of the last remaining impulse cannon that must be used to save the planet by firing well-timed shots to blast the invaders into nuggets.

Finally, we come to *Relentless*, a horizontally scrolling shoot-'em-up from Paul 'Axelay' Kooistra that ran away with almost all the gongs. It's a shooter that incessantly lobs attack waves and ground-based gun turrets at the player with fast, smooth scrolling and colourful graphics. The default difficulty setting offers a decent challenge, which is pretty much what we've come to expect from the author of *Star Sabre* and *Dead On Time*.

Looking at the competition as a whole we feel that it went well; four entries is reasonable for a first go and, although it's a shame that some of the announced games like *The Dungeons Of Count Roland* weren't completed, what was released is impressive both technically and to play. Overall, *Relentless* is the best of the bunch, but the other three are very enjoyable as well.

81%


» [Amstrad CPC] This isn't going to end well.




» [Spectrum] Reaching a fever pitch.
» [Spectrum] Fun with teleportation.

THE SPECCIES

» FORMAT: SPECTRUM » DEVELOPER: TARDIS REMAKES
» DOWNLOAD: WWW.KIKSTART.EU/TARDIS.DK/X » PRICE: FREE

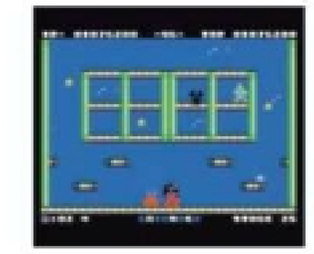
The Speccies are cute little critters that were struggling to get to their various colour-coded homes until help arrived in the form of a huge cursor that could guide them around. What makes the cursor's job more difficult is that, although they're adorable little beings, the average Speccy isn't particularly bright and, when set in motion will just keep on rolling until an obstacle gets in the way. Manoeuvring all of the Speccies to the correctly coloured pad on each stage takes some forward planning, clever use of the environment and sometimes another Speccy as a temporary barrier to line moves up correctly.

The Speccies was put together by Søren Borgquist who was behind the well-received port of *Dingo* to the Spectrum a couple of years ago. The result of his labour and some great graphics from Craig Stevenson is a good looking and taxing puzzler.

85%

MALAIKA

» FORMAT: MSX » DEVELOPER: RELEVO STUDIOS
» DOWNLOAD: WWW.KIKSTART.EU/BATZ-ZX81 » PRICE: FREE



The prehistoric world has been invaded by aliens and *Malaika* is the only person evolved enough to ward them off. Anybody taking on the alien horde unarmed wouldn't stand the slimmest chance, but *Malaika* is resourceful; by throwing the bone she usually keeps in her hair she can stun enemies before running over them for the kill. Each stage has a series of platforms populated by hostile creatures and a stiff time limit to defeat them in. Vanquished foes leave behind trinkets and, if the letters for the word 'extended' are collected, a new life is handed out.

Anyone who has played *Bubble Bobble* should find the gameplay familiar, with stunned enemies recovering to become more aggressive if not dealt with promptly and stages where the wrap-around play area comes in handy to reach otherwise inaccessible platforms.

Malaika is a fun single screen action game with appropriately bright colours and cheerful sound.

89%


» [MSX] You just have a lie down there.


» [ZX81] Subtle product placement.
» [ZX81] Running rings around the moon.

BATZ

» FORMAT: 16K EXPANDED ZX81 » DEVELOPER: PETERZ
» DOWNLOAD: WWW.KIKSTART.EU/BATZ-ZX81 » PRICE: FREE



***Batz* is a** *Breakout*-style game for the ZX81, so the objective is to demolish the wall at the top of each screen by smashing a ball against it. The ball must be kept in play with the keyboard controlled paddle at the bottom of the screen and each stage has a different pattern of bricks, some of which will need more than one hit before they're removed.

It is well executed and supports ZonX hardware for sound, but we found *Batz* to be a little disappointing; there aren't any power-ups or enemies so the only variety between stages is the shape of the wall. That doesn't make it a bad game and what's there is fun, but we've probably been a little spoilt by what *Arkanoid* brought to the table. Adding collectable items or multi-ball would have increased its longevity.

73%

WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community


» [GBA] It's a hell of a concept.

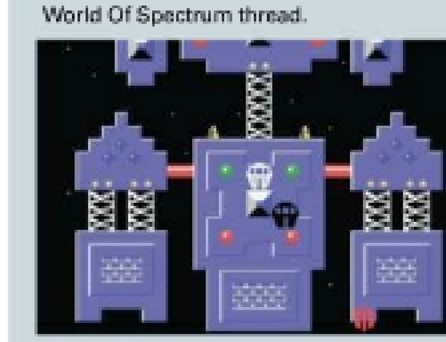
>> Breaking The Ice

The original version of *Pengo* variant *Waimanu* was released earlier in the year for the DS and is a cute re-imagining of the ice-pushing and creature-squishing action game. The developer, Disjointed Studio, has just released a Game Boy Advance conversion and those with the relevant hardware or a decent emulator can pick up a ROM image by pointing their web browser at kikstart.eu/penguin-gba.


» [Spectrum] Why did the frog cross the road?

>> Here's one I made earlier

Hot on the heels of *Arcade Game Designer* comes David Hughes' *Classic Game Designer*, a Spectrum game creation tool for building the sort of simple arcade game seen in the early Eighties. The news of *CGD* arrived a little too late to properly review it for this issue so we will instead give it a once over next issue; in the meantime, kikstart.eu/cgd-spec goes to the appropriate World Of Spectrum thread.


» [TI99/4A] Smooth vertical scrolling on the TI-99/4A.

>> In Space, nobody eats ice cream

We've recently seen the early stages of some scrolling shoot-'em-ups for the Texas TI-99/4A and, judging by what the developer has said at Atari Age, these are proof of concept for other projects but may also become a game in their own right. kikstart.eu/scroll-texas will whisk visitors over to the relevant Atari Age thread which contains a couple of work-in-progress videos.

HOMEBREW

>> The scene's latest news and reviews

WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community

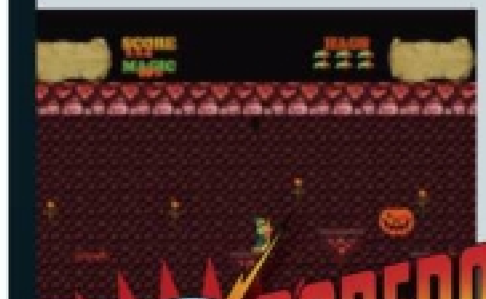
>> DEEP, DARK DUNGEONS

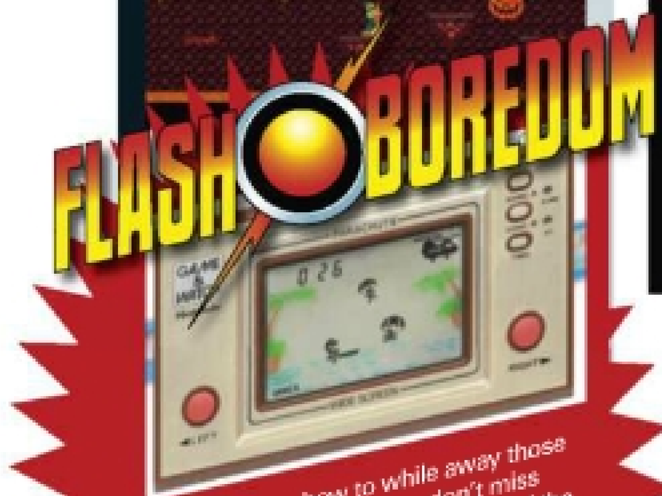
Dark Quest is a turn-based role-playing style game with a fantasy theme available from XBLIG. The player takes control of a barbarian who has been asked to save the land from a dark sorcerer and his evil minions and, as his quest through dungeons progresses, he'll meet others with a common aim who can be persuaded join his party. We've given this a quick try and it works pretty well; fans of fantasy-based RPGs with an Xbox 360 can have a look behind kikstart.eu/dark-quest-xblig and give the demonstration a try.



>> WHICH WITCH IS WHICH?

We're not quite sure how old it actually is – the date on the game says 2007, the documentation 2008 but all the announcements drawn to our attention reckon this year – but there's a Windows remake of *Cauldron* available. For anyone who hasn't played it, *Cauldron* is about a witch trying to collect ingredients for a spell that will rid the land of an evil pumpkin. The download is at kikstart.eu/cauldron-win.





Want to know how to while away those boring office hours? Then don't miss out on **Retro Gamer**'s Flash game of the month. This month we look at **Pica Pic.**

WE DON'T HAVE JUST ONE FLASH GAME THIS TIME BUT OVER 20, AND THEY'RE ALL CLONES OF LCD GAMES WHICH LOOK REMARKABLY AUTHENTIC DURING PLAY. GAMERS CHOOSE FROM A WIDE SELECTION THAT COVERS THE NINTENDO, ELEKTRONIKA AND TOMY EIGHTIES CLASSICS AND SOME ACCLAIM NINETIES LICENSED FRANCHISES LIKE THE TERMINATOR. KIKSTART.EU/PICA-PIC-FLASH.

MORE GAMES WE'VE BEEN PLAYING...



TOY PLANE

» DOWNLOAD: WWW.KIKSTART.EU/TOY-PLANE-XBLIG

***Toy Plane* is** a reworking of the helicopter games that were popular a few years back such as *Copter Game*; the controls are very simple, hold A to make the plane accelerate upwards and release A to let gravity pull it back down.

Unlike the original game however, the randomly generated levels have been replaced by designed stages, each with a quota of stars and rings to fly through which unlock the next. The plane will also take a couple of solid impacts against its surroundings before blowing up.

These updates and the graphical reworking make *Toy Plane* a more substantial game and the level layouts are challenging as well.

REFLECTION

» DOWNLOAD: WWW.KIKSTART.EU/REFLECTION-XBLIG

The objective of *Reflection* is deceptively simple; the player takes control of two avatars and has to position them both onto their own floor switches to complete a stage. This is far harder than it sounds of course, because both characters are steered with the same control stick, with one inverting any horizontal instructions he receives.

While the controls are mirrored, the rooms only *appear* to be at first glance; the buttons are placed differently on each side and variations in the furniture have to be used to tweak where the regular sprite and his reflection are in relation to each other. *Reflection* throws the player in at the deep end but is a solid, playable puzzler once you've worked it out.









BRUCE LEE II

» DOWNLOAD: WWW.KIKSTART.EU/BRUCE-2-WIN

Arriving around three decades after the 8-bit versions, *Bruce Lee II* takes the gameplay elements of the Datasoft original and creates a different world for Bruce and his enemies to inhabit. The game can be skinned to look like an Amstrad CPC or Commodore 64 – sadly the Atari 8-bit doesn't get a look in, despite being one of the original platforms – and, along with many authentic looking in-game graphics, developer Bruno R Marcos has designed some new baddies which fit into this very 8-bit environment. These cameo appearances include a very tall Kareem Abdul-Jabbar sprite and a surprisingly easy Chuck Norris.

As with the original game, Bruce must collect lanterns to complete his mission. The newly created screens are devious enough that they'd happily fit into the original and, even if he ignores his assailants completely, there are still a huge number of inconveniently placed defences that can eviscerate poor Bruce. Sadly, there's no in-game scoring for all those hard-fought victories over Chuck and Kareem so the replay value isn't as high as it could be, but fans of the original should find some amusement in this well presented homage. And, if any 8-bit coders are reading, this one's worth considering for conversion.

HOMEBREW HEROES



JONATHAN CAULDWELL HAS BEEN SHARING SOME OF HIS SECRETS AGAIN WITH THE LATEST VERSION OF ARCADE GAME DESIGNER. AGD HAS BEEN AROUND FOR A FEW YEARS, SO WE ASKED HIM ABOUT ITS PAST, PRESENT AND, INDEED, FUTURE

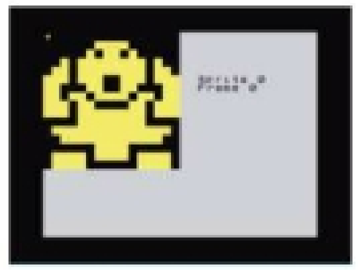
Q&A

So, to start with, where did *Arcade Game Designer* begin?

It all started with the idea early in 2008. It had always seemed that, back in the day, arcade game designers had only let the user change a few aspects of the game such as the graphics, sounds and screen layouts. Those that had offered more flexibility were slow and very few programs actually produced standalone games at the end of the process. I had already written *Platform Game Designer* and figured I could take some of the principles of that, put them together with a basic but faster and more flexible engine and let the user determine the logic with a simple scripting language. A few weeks of coding later I had something I could tentatively show to a few 8-bit enthusiasts who might be interested in producing their own games. So I started a thread over at World Of Spectrum…

What has shaped it over the years? Is there a community of users offering suggestions?

Yes, there are plenty of users and many of them can be found regularly on the official *AGD* forums – arcadegamedesigner.proboards.com – posting tips, reporting bugs or requesting more functionality! I often post tips and answer questions there myself. It's a great place for advice on creating games with the tool. Best of all, I get to hear about problems or requests for features so I can track down bugs or make other changes to generally improve things. That's how *AGD* has evolved – user input. While we're on the subject of the *AGD* community, an honourable mention must also go to Paul Jenkinson, not only for having written several *AGD* games himself, but for producing a fantastic series of YouTube tutorial videos – randomkak.blogspot.co.uk/p/agd-video-tutorials.html.



» [Spectrum] Oh my goodness, I'm a sprite!

AGD has matured over the years, so do you have plans to expand it further?

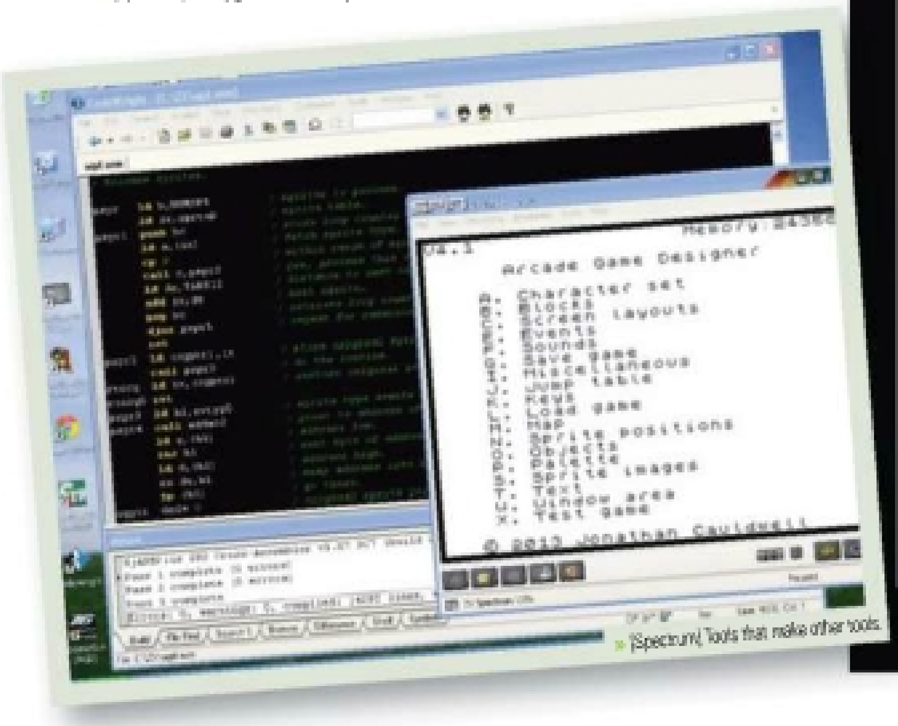
Maybe, but I won't be adding too many new features for a while. I've recently converted *AGD* over to the Amstrad CPC and may consider conversions for other platforms. Meanwhile, Tony Thompson has adapted his TommyGun editor to work with *AGD* and, ultimately, we'd like to create a multi-platform 8-bit game development tool for the PC. The idea is that users can design their game in a GUI environment then automatically generate emulator files for a number of 8-bit machines. However, we would need to recruit more developers to add 6502 or 6809-based machines.

Have there been features that seemed a good idea but didn't work in practise?

I'm not convinced that Kempston Mouse support will be much use, but it was requested by a couple of users so it's in there now. There are definitely features which haven't been used very often, like the *Dizzy*/*Magic Knight*-style menus. Those will remain there for anyone who wants to create arcade adventures. The DIG and FILL commands were hardly ever used, so they've sort of been replaced in *AGD 4*. It's no longer possible to use all of *AGD*'s features in a single game so it remains to be seen which new functionality will prove to be the most popular.

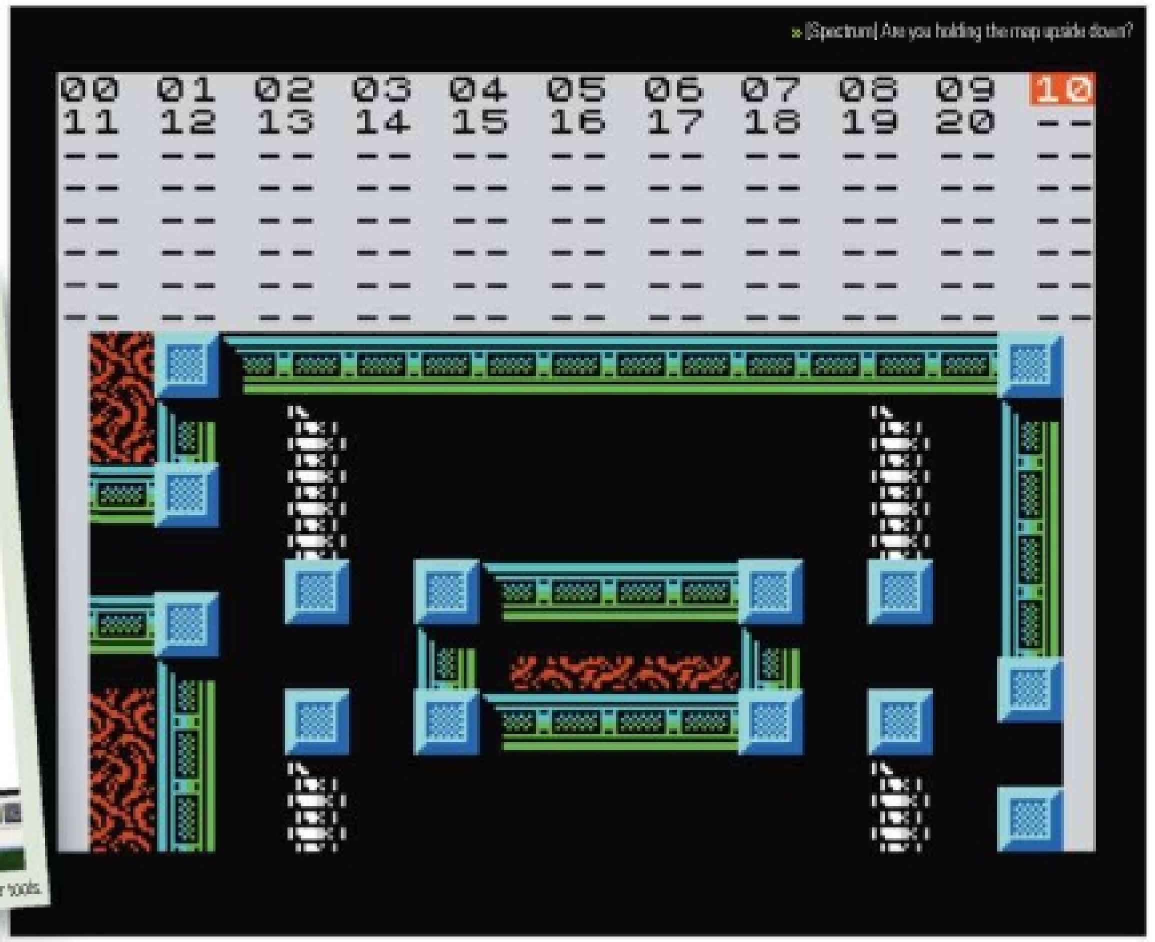
Finally, what advice would you give to anybody looking at making their first *Arcade Game Designer* game?

Enjoy yourself! It's designed to be simple to pick up and you don't have to know anything about programming when you begin. Have a play around and see what you can do. Just remember there are still one or two bugs here and there so save your work regularly!



» [Spectrum] Tools that make other tools.

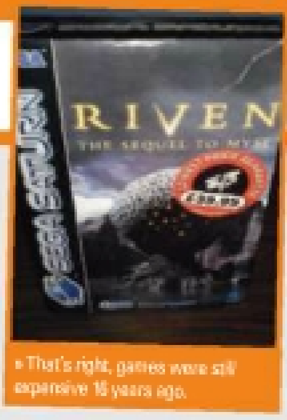
» [Spectrum] Are you holding the map upside down?



MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY... SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**

STAR LETTER



» That's right, games were still expensive 16 years ago.

CONSOLE WARS

Dear Retro Gamer,
With another console war potentially on our hands with the PlayStation 4 and Xbox One, I wondered what past 'wars' (for lack of a better term) were like.

I'm only 25, so when I was a kid I didn't really understand that there was a difference between the Master System and NES or the Mega Drive and SNES – I just loved playing games. I thought it would be interesting to find out if the whole 'fanboy' thing has been going on for years, or if it has only been since the rise of the Internet and social media. When did everyone stop appreciating these systems for what they are and become so narrow-minded?

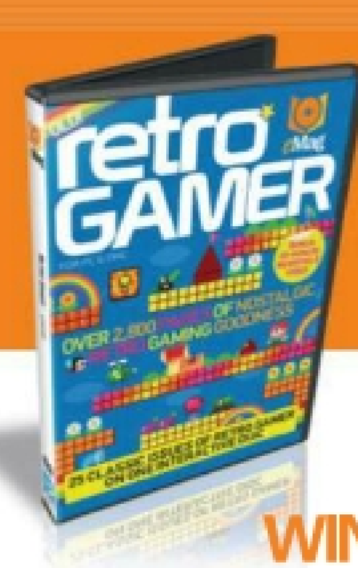
Also, your piece on *Myst* was excellent and took me back to playing *Riven* in my Saturn days, which I recently dug out, amongst others – I've attached some pics (can you believe the price?)

I've always loved the magazine guys – keep up the good work.

Cheers,

Chris Dakers

Unfortunately Chris, console and computer wars have been raging forever. Darran would routinely get into arguments about why the Amstrad CPC 464 was better than the Commodore 64 and Spectrum, and this continued as newer systems came out. Even today it's still raging, and you've only got to visit popular forums to see that some people just can't move on. Maybe we'll do a feature on it at a later date...



WIN!

Every month, one lucky reader will receive a copy of our latest eMag, **Retro Gamer Load 3**, a bargain if ever there was one. All you have to do is present a lucid, thought-provoking piece of literature that melts our souls. Failing that, something funny with swear words or something *Strider* related will go down just as well…

From the forum



» www.retrogamernet/forum

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on the forum and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know...

Your favourite fighting games

Hiro
Not really a fan of the genre, but my vote goes to *Fightin' Spirit* for the Amiga. Huge, well-animated characters, beautiful backgrounds... it could easily be mistaken for a Neo-Geo game. Great use of the glorious AGA chipset.

Antiriad2097
Karate Champ. I've put so many hours and ten pence pieces into that game I could probably have bought the arcade cabinet. Naturally, I'm also a big fan of *Way Of The Exploding Fist*, which was the first home computer game to catch the essence of *Karate Champ*.

nef1
IK+ on the Amiga. You don't need all this 3D nonsense to deliver puglistic perfection, they got it right in 1988 and it still hasn't been bettered, in my opinion. I know it's not just boxing but puglistic perfection just sounds so good.

RetroBob
Street Fighter II Special Champion Edition's major plus was being able to up the speed that nicely counteracted the fact that the PAL game runs slower than the NTSC versions.

Liam1982
Fighters Megamix – the fan service, the insanity, the... well... everything really. Rock solid AM2 fighting mechanics, but being able to fight as the Daytona car against whatever-the-flip Deku is? Yes please!

Hitman_HalStep
It has to be *Street Fighter II* for me, but either of the Mega Drive versions, because the six-button pad is the only way I can do the moves consistently.

Megamixer
There are plenty I'd like to choose, but it has to be *Darkstalkers Chronicle: The Chaos Tower* on PSP. The best version content-wise of my favourite fighting game series. It's practically arcade-perfect, portable and I have no problems using the PSP D-pad to play it.

HalcyonDaze00
Virtua Fighter 5 Final Showdown is on a different level to everything else.

Dave300
For the bizarre variety of fighters, *Ultimate Marvel Vs Capcom 3*.



» [C64] Sadly, we can't show you the effect of getting hit over the head with a pillow.

REALITY CHECK

Dear **Retro Gamer,**
I have a story to tell you. Back when I was young and used to play on my C64 – especially at night when I was completely engrossed in a game – my brother would come up behind me, quietly in the dark, and whack me as hard as he could across the head with a pillow. Let me tell you, this was something of a shocking experience, especially whilst treading stealthily through the lower bunkers in *Castle Wolfenstein*.

I did used to get him back though; please don't think I was a wimp. When it was his turn to play, I would do the same and sneak up behind him, usually around midnight, and thwack him hard across the head with my Year 7 Maths Primer book, which was about 850 pages long. That usually did the trick.

Thanks so much for all the tremendously wonderful work,

Ashley J Preston

There's nothing like sibling rivalry is there? One particular favourite trick of ours was to sneak into our brother's room and change all his cassette tapes so they were all in the wrong boxes. We got up to other shenanigans but they're not really suitable for print.

SHAMELESS

Hi **Retro Gamer,**
The other week I went to a car boot. It's getting a lot tougher now because most punters want to charge silly prices because "that's how much it is on eBay". Anyway, I was mooching around seeing the normal ridiculous prices – a £50 NES here, a £40 PlayStation there – when I found a boxed stuffed with Sega Saturn games.

Flicking through the collection I immediately saw a copy of *Panzer Dragoon Saga*. It was missing the outer sleeve, but I knew it was worth money. Both parts of the game were being sold separately at £5 each (they clearly didn't know it was the same game).

As I paid the money to the old woman who clearly wasn't the original owner of the game, I blurted out, "could I not have both for a fiver? They're actually one game." She happily agreed, leaving me alone with my shame. Does anyone else have a similar tale of self-loathing that they'd like to share?

Dean Saunders

Don't beat yourself up too much Dean. While you should be scolded for pulling the wool over someone's eyes like that, we're sure you're not the only reader to have done something like this in the past. Darran once bought *Baldur's Gate* from a charity shop for 50 pence because the woman selling it thought it was a DVD film and not a £5 game. What a cad.

Don't forget to follow us online for all the latest retro updates

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» [Saga Saturn] Darran once picked up *Panzer Dragoon Saga* for £3 from Software Box. He stupidly sold it for further peanuts.

MEGA CD QUERY

Good afternoon Darran,
I was wondering if you have published an issue with a feature for the Sega Mega CD1 or 2? If so, what was the issue number and is it still available? If not, will you republish it in the future?

Kind Regards,

Martin

Unfortunately Martin, the issue in question (Issue 61), is long out of stock, meaning you'll have to head online or wait for our next bookazine... It's a cracking machine and worth a look if you don't already own one.

TAPE KNOWLEDGE

Hello guys,
I've just got hold of a copy of the latest magazine (don't blame me, a wedding got in the way of my picking it up last week) and I felt like I needed to say something specifically to Iain Lee regarding his column. My younger brother, who is the same age as Ben, not only knows why cassettes are linked with videogames, but also used to fight me to play some of said cassette-tape videogames on our Commodore 64. Many happy and fight-filled summer holidays were broken up by a game finally loading, or by either one of us mocking the loading screens with their dancing rainbows and flying arrows.

Fear not Iain – some of the young know their stuff :)

Bekky M

That's good to hear Bekky, although it does concern us how little knowledge there does seem to be of gaming's past. We hear plenty of comments at work, on forums or at home that instantly remind us of how old we are. One such comment was from someone who didn't know who Strider was. What a terrible world that must be to live in.



» Are there other 24-year-olds who knew games once came on cassette tapes? Let us know via the usual channels.

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Space Hulk

This month Darran has been wittering on about *Space Hulk*, as it's just been released in digital form on PC and Mac. He instantly bored everyone in the office with tales of his 2009 edition of the game which is still sitting mint in the box. He can't decide whether to play it or sell it for a fortune.



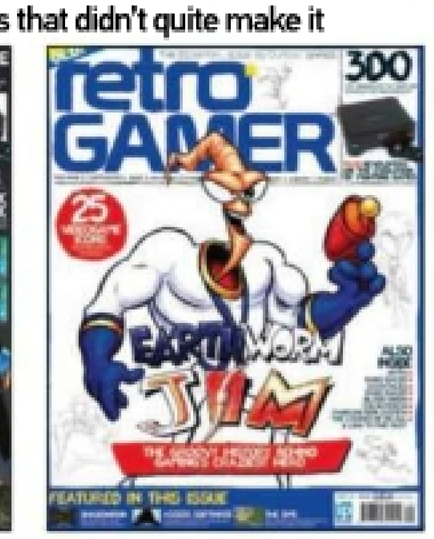
THE ONES THAT GOT AWAY. . .

Darran discusses the covers that didn't quite make it



BLUFFER'S GUIDE TO BEAT-'EM-UPS

This was an earlier option that didn't really get off the drawing board. The aim was to create a fighter's select screen like you'd get in a game, but it would feature fighters from lots of different franchises. It was a nice idea, but we used too few characters to illustrate it and it just ended up looking a little messy.



EARTHWORM JIM

There's a lot of fantastic hand-drawn art for *Earthworm Jim*, and we felt it would be a great focus for a cover. The idea was to use a coloured version of Jim as a focal point, with sketches in the background to give the impression of a lush book. Unfortunately, we couldn't find a suitably dramatic image for the main hit.

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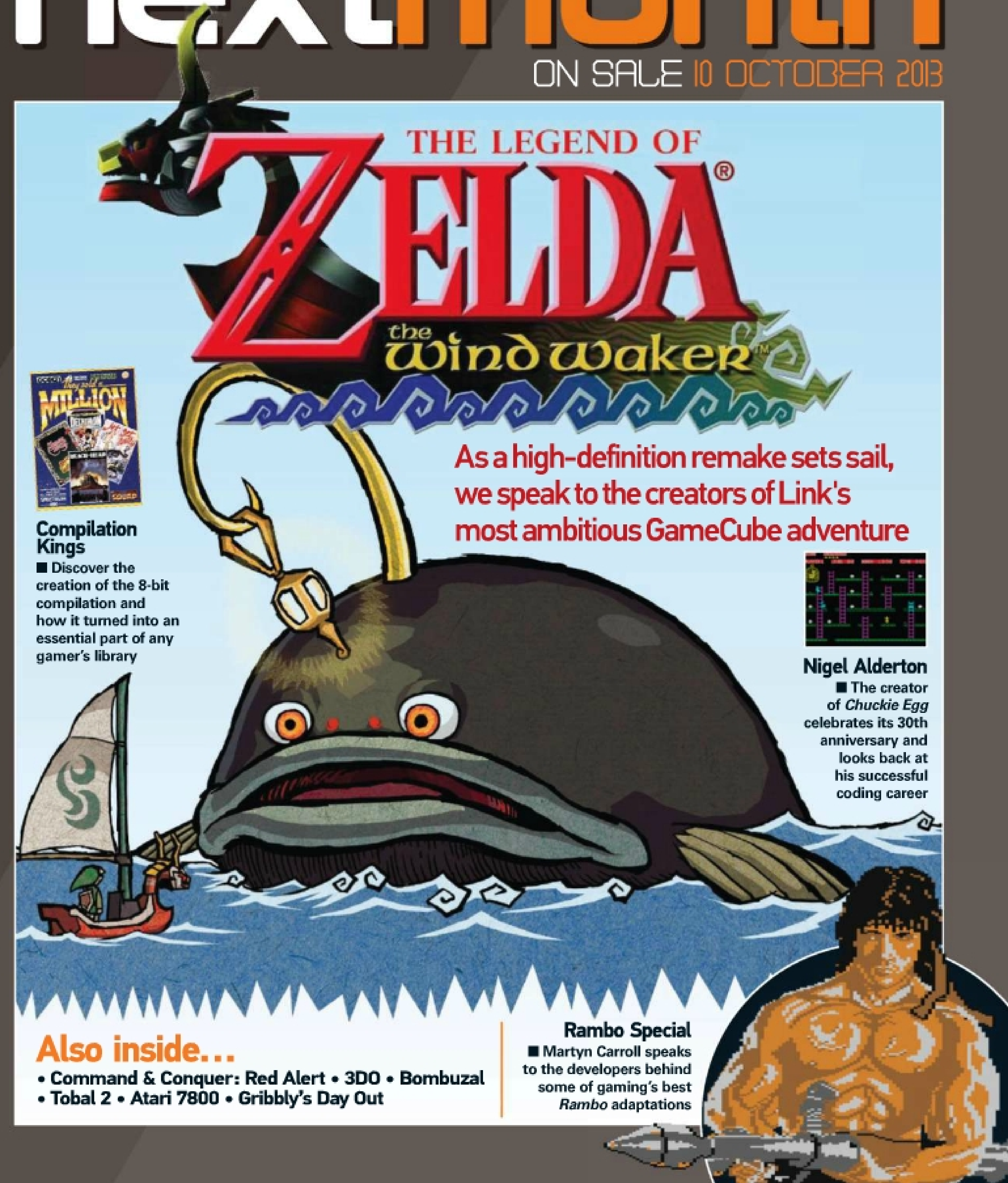
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>> LOAD 121

ON SALE 10 OCTOBER 2013



As a high-definition remake sets sail, we speak to the creators of Link's most ambitious GameCube adventure

Compilation Kings
■ Discover the creation of the 8-bit compilation and how it turned into an essential part of any gamer's library

Nigel Alderton
■ The creator of *Chuckie Egg* celebrates its 30th anniversary and looks back at his successful coding career

Rambo Special
■ Martyn Carroll speaks to the developers behind some of gaming's best *Rambo* adaptations

Also inside...

- Command & Conquer: Red Alert • 3DO • Bombuzal
- Tobal 2 • Atari 7800 • Gribbly's Day Out

ENDGAME



SUPER MARIO RPG: LEGEND OF THE SEVEN STARS

» Just before it buggered off and neglected Nintendo consoles for an entire generation, Squaresoft chucked Mario into his first RPG and, in doing so, made Legend Of The Seven Stars the Super Nintendo's final Mario title. It was a peach of a game from the makers of the epic Final Fantasy series, and gamers fell head over heels for the isometric witty madness of it all



01

» The final star has been collected and the Star Road is complete. Geno has said goodbye. Now it's time to inspire the intro makers of Stars In Their Eyes with some whizzy star-like schmaltz. Tonight Matthew, Mario is going to be stunned.



02

» An eternity passes as the stars shoot into the sky, leaving a solitary twinkle in their wake. The sword Exor dissolves and blows into the wind. Mario and his gang are rooted to the spot for the entire night in utter awe at this natural phenomenon.



03

» They think it's all over – not yet it ain't. Like an Oasis record, it just can't end so cue some "closure" as we discover the fates of our friends. Mallow is crowned the prince of Nimbus Land. Who'd have thought it?



04

» Bowser repairs his keep, Jonathan Jones eyes the sunset alone, Croco races the Mushroom Derby against Yoshi and Frogfucius and his students go to Toadofsky's top gig. Valentina and Booster get married. Bumbling Dodo is confused when Booster darts off, leaving Valentina in hot, passionate, spurned pursuit.



05

» Not to worry, villains can't commit anyway. But look at Mario and Princess Peach – they're well happy. Peach is a latter day Kate with her little waves, but Mario sticks two fingers up. Or maybe it's a sign of peace. Who knows? The loveable scamp. With a wink, he's gone. Cue a parade of characters.